

WHO BURNT THE VULCAN? OLD CAPTAIN HATHAWAY'S STORY.

BY W. H. MACY.

WHEN lying in the port of Callao, Peru, being then in charge of the Vulcan, my first command, I had occasion to ship two or three men to fill vacancies in my crew. Among them was an Italian, a tall, stalwart young fellow, with swarthy countenance and heavy black hair which he wore long, on his shoulders. His features were rather handsome, but the expression not pleasing, as he had a restless, roving eye, and a way of parting his lips and showing his teeth when he smiled, which I never liked. But he spoke English fluently, and was evidently a man of intelligence, and a prime seaman, as indicated in those little signs by which one sailor knows another, and which go to make up what is meant by the expressive phrase, "the cut of his jib." I had little hesitation about shipping him; and, having filled our quota, we sailed in high spirits, for a cruise off the Galapagos Islands.

Our usual success followed us; we found sperm whales plenty, and within two months after leaving Callao we had taken five hundred barrels of oil, which made us up to two thousand; I had found occasion to observe, during this time, that Leonardo, the Italian, was a man likely to make trouble among a ship's company. His temper was sullen and vindictive; and, although, as I had supposed, an able seaman, he did not do his duty willingly, and seemed to chafe under any show of even reasonable and wholesome authority.

He was midship-oarsman of the waist, or second mate's boat. One day, we came on board from a chase of whales, and the boat-steerer, a fine young man named Lawrence, called upon him to give him a lift with a heavy tub of line. This, being in one of his surly humors, he refused to do, and gave an insolent reply, which Lawrence, of course, resented. A few sharp words ensued, when

the Italian drew a knife and stabbed the young man in the side. He was immediately seized by the officers; and, as I came on deck, they were bringing the prisoner aft, while others were gathered about poor Lawrence.

I took in the whole story at a glance, and, simply saying to the mate, "put him in irons, Mr. Daggett, and keep him secure," I turned my attention to the wounded man. I was soon satisfied that, with care, his life was not in danger. The vital organs were not injured, and I found means to stop the severe hemorrhage. With my mind lightened of a heavy load, I next considered what was to be done with Leonardo.

Following the promptings of my feelings at the time, I could almost have shot him on the spot, taking the law into my own hands. Had we been near port, I should, of course, have delivered him up for trial, or to be sent home. But, convinced that Lawrence's life was in no danger, I did not feel justified in breaking up the cruise. We were doing well, and if we could remain two or three months more on the cruising ground, our voyage would be made. There was no help for it; Leonardo must be kept in confinement, and the voyage must go on; though I was by this affair, deprived of the services of two able men at a time when every one was much needed.

I did not tell the Italian my real opinion about Lawrence's wound, but rather gave him to understand that it was serious, and his life in great peril. Little he seemed to care about it, either way. He offered no resistance when the handcuffs were put on; but went down into the run, as ordered, with that diabolical open smile on his face, saying not a word. I could not, however, keep him always in close confinement, in a tropical climate; so he was allowed to come on deck in the day time, still with his irons on, and at night was sent below again, the scuttle being pushed a little way off, to give him fresh air.

A few days after this affair, we took a whale; and while boiling, we spoke the barque Persia. Captain West came on board to pass the evening, and we stood along on a wind in company. The Persia's boat was veered astern of our ship, and the breeze being moderate, she towed very comfortably. We walked the quarter deck together long after the watch was set, and I observed that most of the men forward were also on deck, "gamming" with the strange boat's crew.

At about nine o'clock some one rushed aft with the report that the forecabin was full of smoke. This had been perceived for some time, but had been supposed to originate in some way from the tryworks, though the fires were drawing well, and the smoke driving off the lee quarter, as it should do, when close-hauled. But it had now become so dense that they gave the alarm.

I ran forward and jerked off one of the fore hatches; but the moment it was lifted, the smoke and flame rushed out to such a degree as to drive me back. A main hatch was moved with a similar result; and I ordered everything tightly closed, the fires in the arches to be drawn and extinguished, and axes brought for cutting holes in the deck. It appeared that the fire was under the tryworks; and I know that my first impression was that it had caught from that source; probably from letting the water dry up in the "caboose-pen."

This, it may be necessary to explain, is the space under the brickwork, between it and the deck, which is always to be kept full of water while the fires are in operation; and it is the duty of the officer of the watch to see that the water is replenished now and then, as it simmers away and evaporates from the great heat above.

We cut through the deck and began pouring down water, but a few minutes' work showed us that this was useless, and it was abandoned. In the mean time the boats were lowered and veered astern, as we feared the flames might burst out suddenly amidships, when it would be too late to do it. The fire worked rapidly aft under the deck, and the cabin was so filled with smoke that it was at some risk of life that we managed to secure a few valuables. We felt no anxiety for our ultimate safety, as we had good boats, fair weather, and a consort under our lee.

A light had been set at the gaff, which was understood by the mate of the Persia as a signal for the "gam" to close, and he backed his maintopsail and also set his light for us to run down, knowing nothing, as yet, of the state of affairs on board the Vulcan. It soon became painfully evident to us all that nothing could save the ship. I ordered every one aft and put the helm up. As she swung off before the wind, the flame and smoke drove forward, which gave us some relief and enabled us to make our arrangements more deliberately.

Until now Captain West and his crew had

been so busily employed in assisting our efforts, that no one had found time to look over the taffrail at the boat towing astern. His boatsteerer now reported no boat to be found. We ran to the stern to find his report true; the Persia's boat was gone! The warp was towing; we hauled it in, and found nearly the whole length of it, showing that it must have been cut or parted within a foot or two of the boat's stem. But we had no time for conjectures.

I glanced about me to see if my crew were all safe. Lawrence had been helped up from below, and was among us, but no one knew anything about the Italian. I threw open the skylight and peered down into the cabin. The smoke was not so dense now that the wind blew from aft; and, at intervals, I could make out that the run-scuttle was just as I had left it, open a little at one end to allow of ventilation; but no one could have come up without pushing it back more. Leonardo was not with us, at all events; and, if still below, he could not be alive.

It was too late to make any attempt to save him; and, as I closed the skylight, a glance forward showed me the tryworks settling down, the earlines having burned away under the deck. In a moment more the massive brickwork inclined to starboard, reeled and fell through with a crash; and, as the fire caught the deluge of oil from the pots, a column of flame and smoke shot heavenward, roaring and seething, masthead high.

We were at this moment within a quarter of a mile of the Persia's stern. The conflagration, lighting up sea and sky, showed her crew swarming on the rail and in the rigging, all transfixed with amazement and horror at sight of this pyramid of flame moving down upon them. Whatever was to be done must be done quickly; the foremast, with its sails and hamper, was already in flames, and the heat was becoming so intense that it could no longer be endured.

The men went to their places in the boats without confusion, while I took the wheel myself, determined to be the last man to leave her. When Mr. Daggett hailed to report all safe and waiting only for me, I put the wheel to starboard and gave her a sheer to pass well clear of the Persia.

"Is Lawrence all right?" I asked.

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered the young man for himself.

"Has anybody seen Leonardo?"

"No sir."

I jumped on the taffrail and slid down by a rope into one of the boats. "Shove out and out oars!" And we fell rapidly astern out of range of the intense heat and smoke.

I sat down by the side of my friend West, and now, for the first time, found leisure to consider my loss, and to realize the terrible blow to my worldly prospects. The Vulcan and her two thousand barrels of sperm oil were totally lost, and I had not a dollar insured. Insurance was not, then, so general as now, and I had always been willing to trust to the good luck which had heretofore attended me. I thought of my young wife to whom I had been united shortly before sailing; of the high hopes of rich reward which had cheered and sustained my labors for more than two years, only to find my hard earnings all swept away in an hour; and, for the moment, felt broken in spirit.

But this was but momentary. Youth and health are never despondent long, if the conscience be clear; and by the time we arrived on board the Persia, I was able to look with some degree of composure upon the magnificent sight presented by my burning ship off the quarter. We continued to watch her, till, one by one, her masts fell into the ruins, and her hull, wrapped in the devouring element, was gradually reduced to a charred and smouldering mass. A few casks of oil, which had floated out, were picked up next morning; but this was all that was available of the late stout vessel and her valuable cargo.

Meanwhile, we were all made as comfortable, for the time being, as the crowded state of the Persia would admit. We discussed now, at our leisure, the history of the fire and its probable origin. I expressed an opinion that it was caused by the water being suffered to run too low in the box under the brickwork. This brought out Mr. Hunter, the second mate, who was positive he had it filled with water not an hour before the fire was discovered; that he had personally overseen the job, and satisfied himself that it was full. In this he was fully confirmed by the two men whom he named, who had handled the buckets and put the water in.

"Besides," said Mr. Hunter, "if the fire had begun there, it would have burnt out at once through the opening of the box; there would have been, it seems to me, no chance for a doubt about the matter; whereas, you know, it was raging for some time *under* the deck, with no escape or vent."

This was true; and it completely changed

my first crude opinion. I at once said as much, acquitting the second officer entirely of all shadow of blame on the score of negligence. But no lights had been used under deck since the night before, except in the forecabin and cabin; while the fire had originated amidships. I found both the chief officers of the opinion that the prisoner in the run knew more about it than any one else, and that he had escaped in Captain West's boat. The warp had been carefully saved and brought on board. It measured nearly seven fathoms, showing that only a foot or two had been lost; but the end was unfastened and so much sagged by the action of the sea in towing, that it was impossible to tell, from its appearance, whether it had parted or been cut. One thing was certain, if it was cut, the man who cut it must have been in the boat.

"Well," said I, after we had discussed the matter in all its bearings, "it's not likely that the mystery will ever be cleared up any further than it is now. The Italian has either been smothered in the run, or he has gone adrift in the Persia's boat. In the latter case, he will be likely to land on one of the islands under our lee; but it would be like hunting for a needle in a haystack to look after him. Besides, it's of little consequence to us now what was the *cause* of the fire. Its *effect* is, that we have lost our all, and must begin the world anew. Still, I must admit it would be some satisfaction to know, positively, whether it was incendiary or accidental."

I remained with my friend West until his arrival at Talcahuano, where I shipped as mate of a vessel for the run home. I found my family all right, my owners well satisfied with my conduct and ready to start me again with another ship. I found also that an eccentric uncle had died during my absence, leaving me heir to a comfortable old house, and some little personal property, on condition that I added his name to my own. As I thought my mother's name as good as my father's, I had no objection to bearing them both; and, after the usual forms of petition, I became Paul Covell Hathaway. It will be seen that it was important in the sequel of my story.

I made several voyages after this with a fair share of success; but no further light was shed upon the Vulcan mystery. I learned that the Persia's boat had been picked up in good condition by another ship, about eighty miles to leeward of my position at the time of

her loss. Everything was found in its place, and the natural presumption was, that she had struck adrift and gone off "on her own hook." The short piece of warp attached to her bow was sagged and soaked out like the other. It might either have been cut or parted.

It was not until during my last voyage to sea, in 1849, that the veil was lifted from the mystery of the destruction of my old ship, and the crime of the incendiary met with its retribution.

I was then in charge of the fine ship Ringdove, bound on the Japan ground, and was running down the north side of the Caroline group, intending to make a port at Guane, one of the Ladrões. Two canoes came off to us from the island of Ponapi, or Ascension, in each of which was one white man, with several natives. I had visited this island before, though anchoring on the southwest side, and I knew these white "beach-combers" to be, for the most part, a set of graceless scoundrels.

The man who first jumped on board introduced himself as a Frenchman, gave his name as La Roque, and asked if I spoke French, to which I replied in the negative. I understood it very well, but felt justified in keeping this advantage of him. In this way, I found that he could speak English well enough. He was a tall man, of forty or more years, with black hair cut close to his head, and a thick bushy beard, turning to gray, which served to conceal his features. The other white man soon joined us, a little diminutive fellow, who hailed from the same nation, and I had no doubt of the fact, for every wrinkle in his nose was French. They conversed in that language with each other, but when addressing me, spoke English, in which accomplishment Pierre or La Roque was far ahead of his little companion, Alexandre, or Aleck, as he gave his name to me. Something about the former seemed strangely to bring up old memories, but I could not recall where or when I had ever met him before. I even thought of my Italian friend of the Vulcan, but I could not make him look like this man. Besides, Leonardo was no Frenchman, and I had never, to my recollection, heard him make use of that language.

The two men persuaded me to go in and anchor in the bay where they resided, and I decided to do so; for I had a large stock of tobacco, prints, and other articles of traffic, such as are wanted at this island. So we

roused up the chain cables, Pierre La Roque installed himself as pilot with little Monsieur Alexandre for his lieutenant, and within an hour the Ringdove was ridling at her anchor in Boytick Harbor on the northwest side of Ascension.

This haven is very small, scarcely affording room for half a dozen vessels, and the channel of exit and entrance is very narrow. La Roque showed himself an excellent pilot, and handled the ship with the skill of a practised seaman. Of course, he acted as my interpreter and "trading-master" during my stay; and, for the most part, he and Alexandre boarded and lodged on board, and made themselves quite at home in my cabin. They always conversed in the French language, paying no regard to my presence. I had, in my youth, made several voyages to the French West Indies, and had also, in the course of my wanderings, served two seasons in a French right whaler; but I pretended utter ignorance of what was being said in my hearing, and had given a hint to Mr. Bennett the mate to keep his own counsel as to my knowledge of that tongue.

I had all my water and stores on board, and the ship about ready for sea, when one evening I sat at the cabin table on one side, while my two beach-combers on the other side had just lighted their pipes and settled themselves for a comfortable chat.

"Alexandre," said La Roque, suddenly, to his little comrade, "we must take this ship."

I had some difficulty to repress a sudden start, but I recovered myself instantly. I pretended to be intently engaged in reading, and eating a banana which I plucked from a bunch on the transom at my side.

The little Frenchman merely sucked the harder at his pipe and looked coolly to his Mentor for instructions. He was evidently one of those fellows who will "take suggestion as the cat laps milk."

"You see," continued Pierre, "she has lots of plunder such as we want; and, if we take her, you and I will be the richest white men on the island. There's not much tobacco or cloth among us now, for most of the stock from the 'Fawn' has been used up. I say, that was a lively time we had in the weather harbor, picking the bones of that English barque—eh, Alexandre?"

"Yes, yes," assented the little one. "And if you say so, I suppose this one's bones must be picked, too. You've more influence with the old Nanakin than any one else, and I

think you understand putting up a job of this kind more coolly than anybody I ever knew. You must have led a hard life in your day, Pierre."

"Well—so, so," returned the other. "I've had my share of adventures. I have had a hand in a few piracies, have slit some throats and wrecked some vessels in my day—and I once burned a ship at sea, Aleck, a ship that I belonged to, burnt myself out of her, and ran away by the light of the fire!"

"Good!" grunted his pupil. "Where was that, Pierre?"

"Off the Galapagos Islands."

My breath came hot and thick. I rallied all my powers of self-control, and so far succeeded as to bite into another banana with a fair affectation of indifference, while I turned another leaf of the book in which I feigned to be so much interested. Leonardo, my cut-throat Italian, was before me! I knew now, where I had seen that restless eye, and that peculiar parting of the lips in the act of smiling. But he had since lost nearly all his teeth, which fact, with his closely cut hair and heavy beard, had very much altered his appearance. And this man did not know me! Fifteen years of hard service, and more yet, my change of name, had done the business, and saved me from recognition.

"How was it? Tell us all about it," said the little villain, with a glance of admiration at his superior.

"Well, she was an American ship. I don't care to tell her name," said Pierre. (He had no need to tell one of his auditors.) "The skipper was a young man, and built very much like our unconscious friend, the captain, here. Indeed, when I look at his shoulders from behind, I always seem to see that young Captain Covell before me.

"I had been three months in the ship, which was a long time for me to be in one craft, and I was spolling for an adventure of some sort. One day a young fellow, a petty officer, called me to lend him a hand; I did not feel in the humor, and told him I would not do it. He flared up and put on airs, and I inserted my knife under his ribs. I don't know yet, whether he lived or died; but I'm afraid the incision was rather deeper than I meant it to be. Well, they took me aft, and put on me a pair of those large old-fashioned shackle-irons, to confine me as they thought. I was laughing in my sleeve at them, for I knew I could work them off, ay, and on, too, when I should be ready."

Here the scoundrel looked admiringly at his small flexible hands. I dared not glance at him now, for fear of losing my self-command.

"They put me down in the run and kept me there nights, letting me up days for an airing. You may be sure I chafed at confinement, and determined to get my freedom at any cost. A chance was soon offered; we got a whale, and when nearly through trying out, we spoke a barque, and the captain came aboard and veered his boat astern by the warp. I was on deck then and took note of things. I made up my mind to fire the ship that night.

"I had fireworks in my pocket, for I was allowed to smoke when I liked while above deck, I knew that the blubber-room had been cleaned out that afternoon, and that one of the lower deck hatches was left partly off, while the upper ones were closed. At dark I was driven into my cell as usual, and the captains went on deck to spin yarns and smoke; in short, they went about their business and I about mine.

"I lost no time in slipping my hands out of the shackles, and crept through to the main hatchway. I had explored the road before and knew the feeling of every cask in her, abaft the mainmast. The hatch being off, I could pass up between decks without noise. I made my way into the sailroom, knowing where to put my hand on a large bag of tarred oakum, and some rolls of old canvas, which I lugged forward until about under the tryworks. I also found enough greasy wood to start a good bonfire, and keep it going, too.

"I arranged all my combustibles, and fired the piles in three or four places, to make a sure thing of it. When I lit the oakum the flame and smoke spread so quickly that I had enough to do to escape being suffocated; but, as I dropped into the lower hold I managed to pull on the hatch, which kept the smoke out of my quarters for the present. I went back to my old station in the run, and waited until the alarm was raised, and I heard the two captains run forward to look for the fire. I knew then that the coast was clear, and everybody's attention was occupied. So I jumped up into the cabin, placed the scuttle just as I found it, leaped on the transom and dropped out at the stern-window, pulled myself into the barque's boat, cut the warp, and the ship kept on her fiery course, leaving me alone on the Pacific!"

I had preserved my outward appearance of indifference and listened to this detail of the destruction of my ship. But I must still keep cool and not betray by any sign that I understood a word; for if they intended to take the Ringdove from me, I might learn their plans, so as to counterplot a little.

"Well," said Aleck, "did she burn up?"

"O yes. I made a sure job of that. All hands were saved and taken on board the barque, while I lay quietly by at a proper distance and saw the whole performance. When all was quiet I set the boat's sail and ran to leeward. I knew there must be land not far off, and the next day I landed on one of the islands. I set the boat adrift, taking nothing out of her, for I knew she would be picked up, and no one could know but that she had struck adrift while towing. I lived three days on turtle's flesh and some bread that I had brought with me. An English whaler touched there, and I got a passage down to the Marquesas, representing that I had got astray on the island and lost my shipmates, while hunting terrapins."

"*Mon Dieu!* that was well done!" said little Alexandre. "But have you never seen that young captain since?"

"No, never. I would like to cut his throat if I had the chance," answered Pierre.

I felt obliged to him for his kind intentions, but dared not express my gratitude, even by a look.

"But now," asked the little one, "how do you mean to manage this ship?"

"I mean to *mismanage* her, so as to run her on the outer end of the reef. I shall take her out through the narrow part of the passage, and then put her on the rocks, as if accidentally. You must have the canoes ready behind this point of rocks, here. You will go ashore and see the old Nanakin, and get the tribe mustered, for she will get under way to-morrow, just before night. As soon as you see the ship bring up, or hear my signal (you know what that is), you will bring all the fleet as fast as possible. Our innocent friend, here, will suppose you are coming to his assistance to get him off the reef. After that all is plain sailing. We must take out the plunder and burn her. We don't want the ship for anything."

"But what do you propose to do with the crew?"

"Dead men tell no tales," said the Italian, sententially.

I could hardly restrain a shudder at the

coolness of the villain, but I knew that I had him now "on the hip," and could spoil his plan, as well as mete out to him just retribution for his malicious destruction of my ship and cargo, fifteen years before. I found an opportunity to confer with Mr. Bennett, and also with the other officers; enjoining upon them all, by no sign or movement, to betray their knowledge until the proper moment.

To get to sea through the narrow channel in the reef, it was necessary to carry out a kedge to windward, hook it down firmly in the coral, take up the lower anchor and heave ahead on the kedge, until the ship's cutwater was almost rubbing the rocks on the weather side of the bay. We were then to make all sail, hanging by the kedge, swing the headyards briskly, slipping the hawser at the same moment, and cast her head right into the passage, meeting her in time with the helm.

Monsieur La Roque, or Leonardo, showed himself a thorough seaman in performing this somewhat delicate operation. It was well for me that I was to have the benefit of his pilotage through the intricate part of the channel; after which, as may be supposed, I meant to take her into my own hands. Had he purposed to capture the ship inside, I should have had no alternative but to fight to the death, and take my chance of getting her out myself, if I succeeded in repulsing the savages. The calculating villain knew how we would fight if attacked while our ship was afloat; but if he put her on the reef and wrecked her, we could then be decoyed on shore and murdered at leisure.

He took the wheel himself, gave the word when ready to slip the hawser and swing the yards, and performed all his evolutions in beautiful style. The Ringdove obeyed her helm like a thing of life, as she shot into the narrow channel, while Leonardo controlled her movements with such a delicate touch that I could not help admiring his skill, even while I knew he meant to cut all our throats the same night. I knew, too, that the flotilla of canoes, manned and armed to the teeth, were then lying in ambush within a few hundred yards of us, but concealed by a projecting point.

Already we had passed the critical part of the passage, and the reef began to trend to the southward, affording more searoom. The decisive moment had come, and I signed to the officers to be ready. I saw Leonardo's eyes snap, as he suddenly hove the wheel up.

"Captain," said he, "there's a sunken reef makes out here on the weather-bow. I shall have to throw her off a point or two."

Mr. Bennett and the second mate were at that moment behind the Italian, pretending to be doing something with the spanker-boom guy. At a movement of my hand they seized him from behind, and jerked him backward, while I caught the wheel myself and brought her head back to the proper course. Leonardo struggled powerfully with the two officers, whose object was to secure and bind him without noise or confusion. But, by superhuman effort, he threw them both off and jumped to the rail, while I shouted "Kill him!" for I saw that there was no help for it. He had already drawn a pistol and was in the act of cocking it, when a lance, thrown by the third mate, passed through his body; but not before he had put his fingers to his mouth and sounded a peculiar shrill whistle, which was answered instantly by a movement of the leading canoes, starting out from behind the rocky point.

"We will have his partner," said I, "and then we shall have done enough."

I did not fear their attack, now that I had searoom and a good working breeze. Seeing that we were well clear of the reef, I gave the order to back the maintopsail and to remain at the braces, ready to fill again at the word. My Italian had fallen to the deck with the lance still in his body, and no one had offered to pull it out. His life was fast ebbing, but I can never forget the infernal expression of his face, as his eyes rested on me.

"Captain," said he, in a voice hoarse with agony and baffled rage, "you understand French?"

"Like a native, *Leonardo*," I answered. "And, moreover, though my name is Hathaway, now, fifteen years ago it was—*Corell*."

He closed his eyes, gasping out a bitter oath; his spirit was going fast. By this time the leading canoes were coming up with us, and I counted twenty-five which had made their appearance from behind the point, all filled with armed men. As I had anticipated, the foremost one bore the little Frenchman and the old Nanakin of the tribe. They approached within hail, but not seeing their masterspirit, who was now in the agonies of death on deck, they rested on their paddles for a parley. They were evidently puzzled, not knowing what to make of the aspect of affairs. Alexandre, becoming impatient, stood up in the canoe and hailed:

"Where are you, Pierre?"

"Go look for him!" I answered, in *his own tongue*, as I brought my rifle to a sight. Before he could stoop the bullet had passed through his brain. "Brace full the main-yard!" I shouted, as the body of Leonardo, *alias* Pierre La Roque, was launched overboard among the horror-stricken savages; and the Ringdove, under the impulse of fresh

trades, flew on her course towards the Japan whaling grounds.

I had no desire to work any revenge upon the islanders. We had punished the two scoundrels who had so coolly plotted the destruction of all our lives; we had visited just retribution upon the pirate and the incendiary; and had cleared up the mystery of the *burning of the Vulcan*.

WHY I HATE A LOAD OF HAY.

Arnold, Theodore

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WHY I HATE A LOAD OF HAY.

BY THEODORE ARNOLD.

I NEVER see a load of hay without being conscious of a desire to do something unamiable. The feeling is quite involuntary, and sometimes I do not know what it means, without stopping to recollect. There is a reason, however, and a good one; which I am about to give.

I had been sick one spring, a short, sharp fever following a busy, and rather hard winter, and when summer came I found that I must really take an entire rest. I didn't get well as I ought to, and was in danger of falling into another fever.

"Drop everything, and go off into the country," the doctor said. "Wander in the woods, go fishing and hunting, make hay, pick berries, lie on the grass in the sun. But don't go to a watering place, or to any

fashionable resort. Find some good farmhouse, and go there for a couple of months."

Well, I found my farm, a great unpainted house that with its barns, hen-houses, sheep-fold, and various yards, spread over about an acre of land. Outside of this kernel stretched fields, pastures, woods, on every side.

They received me with the greatest cordiality, gave me the spare-chamber, a glorious apartment with a bed radiant with a patch-work quilt which was a marvel of handiwork, plump with feathers for which many a live goose had quackingly been robbed of its down; with a set of painted furniture spanned just from town; with snowy curtains to the windows; with peacock feathers over the looking-glass, with boughs fresh and green in the fireplace. They placed everything in

and about the house at my disposal, they feasted me on the most delicious food I ever ate, they petted and pampered me to their and my heart's content.

The family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Slocum, a hale, hearty couple, Myra Slocum, an apple-blossom of a girl, eighteen years of age, and four younger children, two girls and two boys, from fifteen down to six years old. There had been three more, but they had died in infancy. Besides the family, was one regular hired-man, Zeno Hains, a rough, ignorant fellow, but a good worker, and other help in haying and harvesting seasons.

How shall I paint Myra Slocum? Where get colors bright enough to depict her cheeks, her lips, her blue eyes, her raven hair? How shall I do justice to that lovely, healthy, laughing face, that robust and shapely figure? She was the very picture of health, a laughing Hebe, who had all her life breathed pure air, drunk pure water, kept early hours, eaten wholesome food, and had a good conscience and a tranquil mind. She had no city accomplishments, and all her reading was confined to the "Blue Light," a weekly paper to which I had at that time the happiness of contributing those thrilling tales which caused the lovely Myra the bitterest tears she ever shed. Indeed, the very first evening I was at the farmhouse, I saw her bending absorbed over a paper, with her red lips apart, her breath suspended, and large tears hanging to her eyelashes. I took occasion to pass by her, and look over her shoulder in passing; and there was my own name appended to a story wherein were recorded the sentimental woes of a girl whom Miss Slocum might without vanity fancy was something like herself. By a lucky chance, that heroine lived in the country, had red cheeks, a white brow and profuse black hair.

"Have you any relations of your name?" she asked me, later that evening. "Any gentlemen relations, I mean."

I knew at once what she meant, and that all they knew of my name was the last; my letter to them, and the letter recommending me to them calling me Mr. Arnold merely.

"I have no male relatives of my name," I replied.

"The reason why I asked," Myra pursued, with a charming blush, after having hesitated a moment, "is because I thought you might be a relative of Theodore Arnold, who writes such beautiful stories for the 'Blue Light.'"

"O! I know him," I said, with gravity.

She blushed again with pleasure. Myra was always blushing.

"You know him!" she exclaimed, with enthusiasm. "Do tell me how he looks, and how old he is, and what he says and does. I never knew such a splendid writer!"

Reader, the person who asks "what is fame?" if he had then propounded that idiotic question to me, would have received for answer, Fame is bliss!

I laughed, and I dare say I blushed a little on being thus questioned.

"Men do not much notice other men," I said, "and I don't believe I could give you a very good description of your favorite author. He's about my age and size, I should say, and talks and appears pretty much like other young men. I'll tell you how I can satisfy you. I will write to him for a photograph, or two, a face and a full length, that you may judge for yourself. He will be very much gratified to learn that he has a friend here by whom he is so well appreciated."

"Will you, really?" she exclaimed, breathlessly. "But what will he think of me? You won't tell him my name?"

"He will think you both amiable and charming," I replied, ignoring the last question.

Never was a girl so flustered, so delighted. She would have a picture of her favorite author, and he would really hear about her! She could not enough express her thanks to me, her fears lest she should be thought presumptuous, and her impatience to get the promised pictures.

I wrote a letter to town the next morning, and carried it two miles to the post-office. In it I requested my correspondent to get me the required photographs from Grey, who had a negative, and also to address me simply as Mr. Arnold under cover to John Slocum.

"I thought it better to have my letters come so," I said, to my host, "since at the post-office your name is so well known. And I may not always feel like going down there on chance of a mail."

"All right!" the farmer answered, heartily. "If anything comes for me, they are sure to send it along by the first chance, if I don't go down myself."

It was near haying time at the farm, and from the talk in the family I learned that two young men, friends of theirs, were coming to help Mr. Slocum through the season. One of them was Sabine True, a sailor, who was stopping at home over one voyage, and the

other Nate Melton, a farmer's son not far away. In this country-place there was not the slightest feeling about working for a neighbor, and the two young men were to come quite as friends.

"Nate Melton is a gentleman," Mrs. Slocum informed me, confidentially, one morning as she and I sat alone over the breakfast table. "He has an education, and means to be a doctor, he thinks. Doctor Markham over at Byville is getting old, and he has promised to take Nate into partnership as soon as he is prepared. He's been through college, Nate has, and he's only at home now for a vacation before he goes to the city to hear lectures."

I saw that this young man was an object of great interest to my good landlady, and instantly divined the cause. He either was, or she wished him to be, engaged to her daughter. I boldly resolved to find out.

"Then it would seem that his father does not need his help in haying," I remarked.

Mrs. Slocum laughed.

"Well, no," she said, "they haven't got much grass at Mr. Melton's; and he and our young folks are old friends, and like to get together. He's coming more for a frolic than for work. We always like to see Nate; and father and I think as much of him as if he was our own son."

I laughed a little significantly.

"O!" she said, "there's nothing of that sort. But the young folks are good friends."

Why should I feel glad to know that there was "nothing of that sort" going on at present? Surely, I had not taken a fancy to this buxom country girl!

I sat and thought it over a little while, Mrs. Slocum going about her work. I stirred the grounds in my coffee-cup, drew them up onto the sides of the cup, and tried in an absent way to arrange them into a fortune. All I could make was an ugly ring.

"A ring is a lover," I said. "Can it be I? Or is it this fellow of the pills and powders?"

How still and sweet it was as I sat there! The pure air floating in, perfume-laden, through the open windows, the sound of rustling foliage and bird-songs, the distant lowing of cattle, and the babble of a brook that flowed near the house. I got up, and strolled out through the porch. It was about seven o'clock, and the work of the day was well on. Mr. Slocum and his man had had their breakfast at some far-away hour of early dawn, and were now out of sight, to remain so probably till noon. Anne, the

second girl, and her younger sister, Nell, were just going off to the pasture for strawberries for dinner. The little boys with their mother were on their way to the barn for eggs. Where was Myra? I listened, and presently heard a gentle, intermittent patting from the direction of the dairy. I waited a moment, then followed the call of those plump hands along the north side of the house, where the undried leaves of the hop-vine switched their dewdrops off on me. At the last window I stopped, and looked in on the pretty picture: Myra stood there with her beautiful hair wound in a great braid about her head, the sleeves of her neat print dress rolled quite up to the shoulder, displaying a pair of round, dimpled arms, and a white apron with a bib to it tied around her waist. At the moment I first caught sight of her, she was standing with her head a little one side, her lips pouted, with a painstaking expression, while she held a cake of butter in one hand, and with the other lifted the print from the basin of water in which it lay. A deft little turn of the wrist, and the butter went over onto the print. Then she looked up, and, seeing me, blushed rosily, and didn't know what to do.

"Please go on," I said. "I desire above all things to know the way butter is made. How those delicious solid golden balls can come out of milk has always been to me a mystery. Also, how the wheat, and corn, and blossom relief get onto them."

She collected herself, and I stood and watched and chatted while she went on with her work, not quite so handily, I am afraid, as if I were not there, but still with an enchanting bashfulness.

"Your mother has been telling me about Mr. Melton," I said, abruptly; and no sooner was the name out of my mouth than she laughed, colored, and gave her head a little toss. It was as plain as the nose on one's face. The young man, she knew, liked her, and, perhaps, she liked him.

"I am quite impatient to see him," I went on, watching the pretty coquette. "Your mother seems to have a great affection for him, and speaks very highly of his talents. She says he is quite like a son to her."

Myra laughed again, and, laying the last butter-pat onto the wooden platter before her, glanced at me with a look of saucy defiance, then lifted the platter and bore it away.

I found myself somewhat surprised. I

wasn't used to country girls; and such a mixture of bashfulness and impudence was new to me. But, I reflected as I walked away, women are all alike in one respect, whether they be conventional or rustic. When they perceive their power over us slavish men, they are impudent baggages, from the queen to the beggar.

That evening, at about sunset, the two haymakers came. The whole family had gathered in the porch and yard, Mrs. Slocum with her knitting-work, her husband with the History of England, which he was perusing with absorbing interest, the younger children running about, the hired man, Hains, sitting on a wood-pile, and contemplatively picking his teeth, Myra walking in and out of the house, looking very lovely and very uneasy, and myself sitting in a window beside the porch, and looking out on all. It was a pleasant home scene; and the wide fields waving green for the scythe, the evening song of the birds, the circling forest that cut off from view all other habitations, even the glimpses of poultry and cattle—all framed the picture well.

Myra had glanced at me furtively several times, I could see, both when she passed the door of the sitting-room where I was and when she stood outside the window; but I did not take too much notice of her. I had no notion of allowing her to think that I was completely enslaved, and that she could do as she pleased with me. Moreover, though she kept an eye on me, she also glanced frequently down the road in the direction from which the expected visitors were to come. But, careless as I appeared, I could scarcely keep my eyes off her. Never had I seen the girl look so beautiful. By some inspiration of good taste in dress she wore a pale green muslin with a lace at the neck, and in contrast with that her red and white were quite dazzling. Her black hair crowned her head in a massive braid, and as she walked there was something majestic in her appearance. Why might not life be happy enough with such a simple, healthy, beautiful creature for a companion, even though she did not possess the accomplishments of polite life, and had not brilliant natural talents? Need one be ashamed to present her? Might she not win as much consideration, even as she was, as many a simpering, inane votary of fashion?

She caught my glance as I was thinking thus, and paused as if I had spoken to her, looking at me in a way so plainly appealing

that I instantly forgave her for her morning's impertinence. I leaned out the window and spoke to her, tossing away the cigar I had been smoking, and she came to me at once and with a look of pleasure.

"She shall forget to look for the doctor," I resolved, and immediately began talking to her of whatever I thought likely to interest her most, the theatre, sights in the city, famous writers. At the last subject she flushed up.

"Were you in earnest about that photograph?" she asked, hesitatingly.

"Certainly!" I replied. "I wrote to town for it, and have received an answer. I should have told you of it this morning if you had given me the opportunity."

She glanced at me penitently, and after a moment of bashful hesitation, faltered out:

"I am sorry—" then stopped.

It was enough. If Myra said she was sorry, then one might trust her. She did not know how to make glib excuses which mean nothing.

"I have not yet got the photographs," I said, smiling. "But they will come soon. My friend writes me that they will have to be taken, as there were none on hand."

"What! on purpose for me?" exclaimed the girl.

"Yes; on purpose for you," I replied. "Mr. Arnold is much pleased with the report of your partiality for his writings; and it would not surprise me if he should, some day, put you into a story. And, by the way, it is but fair that, since he has his picture taken for you, you should return the compliment by giving him yours."

Myra leaned against the window-frame, almost unable to speak, her whole face crimson, her eyes sparkling. To her, an author was a far-away, enchanted being, with a halo always about him, some one quite removed from other men; and to be known and noticed by one was to her the height of glory.

While I talked to her, I saw two men coming up the road. But she never looked round, and seemed to have quite forgotten that any one was expected. It was only when the visitors had reached the door-yard, and were welcomed by the whole family that she turned to look, and even then she did not for a moment seem to perceive them with her mind, though their forms were before her eyes.

I examined the new-comers with interest. There was no mistaking the free and easy

sailor, and I turned at once from him to the other. I must own I was a little surprised; for certainly Mr. Nate Melton was as fine looking a fellow as one would wish to see, and a good deal finer looking than one would wish to see, if he were a rival. His form was stalwart, broad-shouldered, and had an easy motion full of manly grace. His hair and eyes were dark, but he had a color almost as fresh as a girl's, and his forehead from which he tossed the damp locks back as he removed his straw hat, was well-developed, square, and as white as snow. I could see that his glance was directed to the window where Myra and I stood long before he reached the house, and that when she did not turn as he came up the yard, his face darkened. When, at length, she recalled her thoughts, and went cordially to meet him, he pretended not to see her till she was close to him, and then greeted her with a touch of coldness.

If I had been gratified by her penitence towards me a little while before, I was now obliged to own that I need not have valued it too highly; for the minx gave the new-comer a look just as penitential, and lingered, looking into his eyes till he smiled and restored her contentment. I watched her with a curiosity not unmingled with anger. Evidently the person whom she loved was Miss Myra Slocum, and she merely wished gentlemen to admire and like her, without having any particular preference, apparently, for any one of them. If she was likely ever to give special thought to one, it would be when he was in danger of being lost to her. I did not leave my window when the new arrivals made their appearance, but took another cigar, and sat looking out, and wondering how long I had better stay at the farm. I had been there nearly three weeks, and was a great deal better in health. Perhaps I might as well go back to town in a week more. But that would depend.

By-and-by the family came in, and I was introduced to the young men. The sailor made me a profound, half-laughing bow, but the other was meaning to give a very cold acknowledgment of my salutation. I put a stop to that, however, by offering him my hand, and giving him a grip that made him wince and color. It was shaking hands before combat; and, also, letting the stalwart fellow see the strength of my muscle. I fancied that on entering the room he had lifted his head in a rather arrogant manner, as if proudly conscious that he was taller and

broad-shouldered than I. I always like to let people see that there is a difference between *large* and *great*, and that gems are smaller than boulders.

He showed generous blood, though, and I liked him for it. Evidently, he had looked on me as an effeminate city chap whom he could fling over his shoulder, and fancied that I valued myself chiefly on my mustache and white hands. When he found his mistake he took a seat by me, and forgetting even Myra, apparently, fell into a wary conversation with me, measuring my strength, evidently. I was perfectly frank with him. He deserved it, and after an hour I had half made up my mind that if his heart was set on Myra I would withdraw and leave the field to him. He was a sensible, good-natured, intelligent fellow, and well-bred enough, though showing marks of country breeding.

But my pacific intentions received a sudden check. Rising from my side when our conversation was over, he said:

"Come, Myra, let's have a little walk. See how the moon shines. I haven't had a walk with you for a long time." Evidently he meant war.

He spoke in a tone so positive that there was no chance for refusal, even if she had wished to refuse. She got up in some embarrassment, and on going out, pretended to have dropped something, that she might have a chance to turn and give me a glance which seemed plainly to say, "you see I can't help going."

I felt angry and bitter, yet I could have laughed at the girl's adroitness.

I will not describe the next week. I cannot. The skill with which that jade played us off against each other, the suppressed rage of Melton, my own affected carelessness, the uneasiness of the family who saw how matters stood, and yet dared not take sides. I was about the house all day while the other was out; but those long evenings were monopolized as much as possible by the doctor; and besides, Myra always carried the ten o'clock luncheon out to the field.

There is nothing like jealousy to make a man think himself in love, or perhaps to make him in love in earnest. And really, before the week was out, I was in quite a spooney condition; not so much that I was, or believed myself to be in love with Myra, but because I did not like to be beaten. There was a little, or a good deal, of liking for her, too. I got so fierce and nervous that

I could scarcely sleep or eat. I was enraged that I should have gone into the woods to be twisted about the finger of a butter-making country girl, and rivalled by a half-educated, hay-making doctor's clerk. But for all that the butter-making girl was a fine creature, and might make a magnificent woman; and I was not sure but I was ready to take her for better or worse. And the rival might one day be a man not to be sneered at.

So I endured the trial a week, and at the end of it both I and Melton were just where we were at the beginning, only rather the worse for wear. Let not the reader suppose that we two spooneys chased about after the girl. We were both too proud to do anything of the sort. She came and went between us, talked first with one, then with the other, and, with an affectation of simple friendliness, did all the courting.

One morning she was particularly sweet to me after the others had gone off haying. She and Melton had been out the evening before, walking by moonlight; and she wanted to make up to me. To be sure, Tom, one of her little brothers, had been with them, and Melton had come in with a dissatisfied expression of countenance, as if he hadn't gained much; but I didn't like it for all that. I didn't choose that the girl whom I was willing to take for a wife should go off taking moonlight walks with any other man, if she meant or expected to be again in my good graces. So, when she hovered about the breakfast table, I read an old newspaper over my coffee, and didn't see that she was there; and when she flitted out into the kitchen to bring in a new supply of dry-toast, I knew, I took advantage of her absence to get up and go out to smoke a cigar in the porch. Then when, after she had cleared the table away, she made an excuse to come in and dust the sitting-room, and arrange the curtains of the window close to which I was sitting outside, I strolled off down the yard and the road to the post-office. Of course she knew where I was going, for it was mail-day; and when, after being gone nearly all the forenoon, I came back with my pockets full of the letters and papers that had been forwarded to me in a great package from town, she looked with eager curiosity for the promised photograph. They were in my pocket, but I said nothing, only ate my dinner in the gayest of spirits, talking more with Mrs. Slocum than with Myra, then seated myself in the sitting-room to read at my leisure letter after letter.

Myra grew more and more uneasy. I could see that this pile of correspondence reminded her that I had other interests and friends than there, and that perhaps she had not the power she imagined over me, and had better be careful. When the men came in to supper, she took but little notice of Melton, and in the evening when I was walking up and down the garden, with my cigar in my mouth, she actually came out and leaned over the gate a little way off.

I waited a few minutes to see if Melton would follow, and, since he did not, I went and stood by her, looking into her pretty moonlighted face.

"Will Mr. Melton be angry?" I asked. "Will he decline to come out for his evening walk while I am here? I will go away if you say so."

"I'm not going to walk with him," she pouted.

"Now don't say that you and the young man have quarrelled," I exclaimed, with the solicitude of a father. "It would be such a pity."

"I don't know what you mean," she said, angrily. "Mr. Melton is nothing to me, and I don't want to be joked about him."

She seemed so much in earnest, and looked so pretty and honest, that I couldn't help trusting her.

"Do you really say that he is nothing to you, Myra?" I asked, looking intently at her.

"Of course he isn't!" she said, immediately. "We are old acquaintances, and that is all. I don't see," pouting again, "why I may not speak to people without having such things said."

We stood there an hour talking over the gate, and it was all I could do to keep from committing myself. I wasn't quite ready to do that yet. If Myra had never managed, or played two parts, I should have used no such caution; but though I almost believed in her now, a lingering uneasiness made me resolve to wait yet a little longer, and see how she would act. But I said enough to let her see pretty clearly what my feelings were, and that I would not consent to share her attentions with any one else.

We went into the house presently, but not before I had kissed Myra's plump hand, and received from it a very decided pressure.

The family were all in the great cool kitchen, which was our favorite resort, and every eye turned on us as we entered.

"Mr. Arnold and I have been listening to the whippoorwills," Myra said, at once, as though it had been the subject of our conversation; when in fact we not only had not mentioned the bird, but I had not heard it. "Why didn't you all come out?"

"We didn't hear them," her mother said, helping to cover the embarrassment. For Melton was looking as black as a thundercloud, and all the rest uneasy.

But Myra was as cool and innocent as a child, and never seemed aware that any one could be vexed. She talked and laughed with all, even Melton, never seeming to notice his short answers.

Melton looked at her keenly, seemed to doubt, was at one moment on the point of yielding, and the next moment steeled himself and would not notice her smiles. Presently, before any one else started, he wished us all good-night, and went off to bed. I followed in a moment, and as I went, heard Mrs. Slocum say:

"Nate is going away to-morrow or next day, Myra."

"Well, it was best for him to go," I thought. And then came a misgiving. Had I really made up my mind to take this girl, if she would have me. Was it worth while to give up the companionship of a cultivated woman of my own class for that of a country girl, unless she had that unsophisticated honesty and pure nobleness of character which, I could not help thinking, Myra lacked.

I slept uneasily, and woke the next morning at the earliest peep of dawn, two hours before my time for rising. I was just about dropping asleep again when I heard voices outside. Instantly I started up and looked out the window. Just underneath, standing at the open window of the sitting-room, was Melton, his scythe over his shoulder, his dark hair curling under the brim of his straw hat; and on the window-sill were a pair of round arms with a glimpse of a glossy braid above them. I saw it all. While I slept, as she thought, Myra was making her peace with her other lover. I didn't wait to watch or listen, but went to bed again.

That morning Myra poured out my coffee, and was as radiant and charming as possible.

"Is it true that Melton is going off?" I asked, carelessly.

"He thought of it," she replied; "but I believe father persuaded him to stay. He thought they could get along without him."

I said no more; but along in the forenoon

strolled out into the fields. I felt tired, uncertain, harassed, and after walking about a while, oppressed by the heat, gladly betook myself to a place of shade. It was a clump of alders that grew thickly, and left a little bower underneath. The sward was soft, and there I laid down, with violets under my head. Just in front of me was a load of hay, and on the other side of it a mossy rock under a tree. This hay had been gathered up in the morning and was waiting till the farm horses should be at liberty to haul it in, the men, meantime, mowing in another field.

I don't know how long I lay there. The heat overpowered me, and my sleepless night told on me. I must have been asleep some time when I was awakened by voices, and opening my eyes, saw Melton and Myra standing at the end of the load of hay, having evidently paused there in their walk.

"Tell me truly, Myra, are you engaged to that city fellow?" the young man was asking, sternly, as I looked up.

"What nonsense!" she exclaimed, looking at him with reproachful surprise. "You take such silly fancies, Nate. Of course I must be civil to him when he is in our house."

"And haven't you any idea of being engaged to him?" pursued the questioner, bent on getting at the truth at last.

"Of course not!" she said, looking up with the utmost innocence. His face brightened.

"Then you don't care anything about him?" he persisted.

"O bah!" she laughed, with a toss of the head. "I won't answer such nonsensical questions."

"Tell me, then, if you do care about me," said Melton, blushing up crimson, and seizing her hand.

Myra broke from him, but with a coquettish glance into his face that made my blood boil, and laughingly ran away round the load of hay. He followed, and they were hidden from my sight, except that I saw underneath the load their feet, and that for an instant they were close together. I believed that he caught and kissed her. I would have given thousands at that moment to have known: whether it was true. Every nerve in my frame was like steel, every artery was as though filled with rushing fire. It was all I could do to keep where I was, and not start up and confront that girl.

After a little while I heard another laugh, and Myra appeared running back to the

house, while Melton walked off to the field again. He turned and looked after her and I saw his face. It was not that of a man who despairs.

I laid there till they were both out of sight, and my feelings were not to be envied. I had liked the girl. It seemed to me at that moment that I had loved her. If I knew that Melton had not kissed her, I should not have minded so much; but I thought he had. What good would it do me to charge her with it? She would be sure to deny. In my uncertainty and rage I cursed that great stupid load of hay for being there. I could have torn it in pieces. It was of no use for me to think that the girl's duplicity was plain enough without any further proof. What man would not be wild to know if the girl he loved had given another such a proof of affection.

I went off for a long walk in the woods, and when, at an hour past dinner-time, I went back to the farmhouse, my mind was made up, my heart as free from my love for Miss Myra Slocum as if I had never seen her.

"I'm so sorry I give you the trouble of keeping my dinner for me," I said, pleasantly, to her.

She had looked a little uneasy and embarrassed at first, but brightened when I smiled, and assured me that it was no trouble at all.

Mrs. Slocum came in with her beaming, motherly face, and said they were afraid they had lost me.

"I went for my last stroll in the woods," I said. "I have had letters from town, and find that I must go back. I shall start to-morrow."

Mrs. Slocum cast a quick glance at Myra, who colored violently; then began to say how sorry they would be.

I cordially expressed my own regret at leaving such kind friends, and my gratitude for all they had done for me.

Myra flung out of the room, angry, yet half ready to cry. I didn't care. If she was sorry for losing an admirer, she could feel no great pain at heart. She would console herself with Melton, and he would make her a good husband. Perhaps she would make him a good wife after she was sobered down a little.

She didn't mean that I should think she cared, and perhaps, hoped still to pique me into some show of jealousy; for she never noticed me, but was all smiles and honey to Melton that night. Still, I could see that she was rather pale, and that she kept in sight of me the whole evening.

The next morning I took leave of the men early, for I was to start at eight o'clock.

"I wish you all happiness," I whispered, with a laugh, as I shook hands with Melton.

He frowned slightly. I could see that he was not yet sure, and that he also had seen the drift of Myra's attentions the evening before. She was very haughty with me that morning, and scarcely looked at me, though she gave me the opportunity to speak alone with her, if I chose. I did not choose. I passed by the door of the sitting-room, where she sat alone, and went into the kitchen where Mrs. Slocum and the children were. I had some little gift for each one, and when I had presented them, asked for Myra.

"I promised her some photographs," I said. "And I have them here, if she still wishes for them."

One of the children went and brought her. She looked at me disdainfully.

"Perhaps you won't care about them," I said, smilingly. "If you do not, then please give them back to me."

She took them, and at the first glance her face reddened violently, and tears of mortification and regret rushed into her eyes.

"It isn't you!" she exclaimed. "Your name isn't Theodore!"

"I am Theodore Arnold," I said, laughingly, "and very much flattered that my stories suit you."

I turned then to talk to the others, and tried to draw attention from the girl, whom I pitied. She was completely and bitterly humiliated. Here was the hero whom she had worshipped, and yet unknowingly slighted and deceived. I dare say no heroine of story who has insulted a fairy in disguise ever felt more severely punished than did this simple country girl when she found out that she had lost an author. She made one desperate effort as I went out when the stage came for me.

"Mr. Arnold, are you angry with me?" she said, pleadingly.

"Not at all, my dear!" I said, lightly. "I have no reason to be. You have merely amused yourself. I wish you all the happiness in the world." So saying, I raised my hat, got into the wagon, and was driven off.

And yet my heart was pained. At that last moment, and at sight of her penitence, if I had but been sure that Melton hadn't kissed her the day before, I would have forgiven her, and asked the right to kiss her myself. But—

And so, ever since, I have hated the sight of a load of hay.

WHY OUR WEDDING WAS POSTPONED.

BY N. P. DARLING.

"How are you, Althof?"

"Why, Thornhock, how do you do?" and my old friend grasped me by the hand. "You're looking finely, my boy. City life agrees with you, for a wonder."

"Yes," said I; "but, my dear fellow, when did you come in?"

"This morning, on the boat."

"And you were coming to see me?"

"Well, yes, if I could find time. I came in on business, you know, and that must be attended to first. Where can I see you this evening?"

"At No. 48 M—— street. I'm boarding there. Bang-up place, my boy, but I shall stop there only for a short time longer—going to run an establishment of my own."

"What! you aint going to—"

"Marry? Well, I am. I've found the woman at last."

"Going to be married?"

"Yes. I've bought a house, and it's all furnished, and everything in readiness. Claribel selected the furniture. You shall see her to-night, so don't fail to come. We'll crack a bottle of wine together, and talk over old times. By the way, that's a splendid diamond ring, Althof. If I am not too inquisitive, where did you get it?"

"O, I'll tell you about that to-night. I bought it, but not in the regular way. It's a very valuable ring, but it isn't worth quite what it cost me."

"I've seen a ring very much like that."

"Have you, though? Indeed! Perhaps it was the very same. But never mind, I'll tell you all about it to-night, and in return you will introduce me to the lovely Claribel, for I suppose she is lovely, at least, in your eyes."

"You shall judge for yourself, Althof. She is one

———"whom to call
Pretty, were but to give a feeble notion
Of many charms, in her as natural
As sweetness to the flower, or salt to ocean."

"Indeed! Well, good-day, Thornhock. Don't forget that I'm coming to see you to-night, and so take your lady-love to the theatre, instead of remaining at home to entertain your friend."

"Never fear that. Good-morning," and Althof hastened down Broadway, while I strolled leisurely towards home.

Perhaps I may as well mention here, that I have the misfortune to be quite wealthy. I was once a very ambitious young man. It

was my intention, if possible, to make the name of Thornhock famous, but unfortunately for my good resolutions, my uncle, Timothy Kosh, died, and by his last will and testament I was made sole heir to his vast property. That smothered all my ambition. I had wealth, and it seemed to me that it was my duty to enjoy it.

Up to this time I had resided in P——, my native place, but after coming into my property, I thought that a winter in New York was just what my system required, and I packed up accordingly, and departed for Gotham.

It was at the fashionable boarding-house, presided over by the affable Madame De Lizma, that I first saw Miss Claribel Glaverneck. She was an orphan, and supported herself by her pen, she informed me. She said she was the author of that deeply interesting novel, entitled, "Viola; or Sixteen times Divorced. A Tale of Chicago."

I never saw the work. It was sufficient for me to see the authoress. Knowing that she was an orphan, I could but pity her, and knowing my pity, she could but love me in return.

I escorted her to the theatre, and to the opera, and we rode together in the Central Park. I bought me a span of splendid horses, especially for that purpose, because I knew that Claribel was fond of riding. And she could drive, too, and liked to make a sensation, while holding the ribbons, by indulging in some rather fast driving.

I must confess that I was rather proud of her, and I fancied that the young men of my acquaintance envied me exceedingly. Such a really stylish woman could hardly be found in the whole city, as Miss Claribel Glaverneck.

One of my acquaintances insinuated that she cared more for my money than she did for me, but what cared I for such insinuations? The poor fellow was only envious, of course, and upon my honor I couldn't blame him.

Before I had known her a month, I was sure that she loved me. Every glance of her beautiful eyes, every action told me so. Ah! what exquisite bliss it is to feel that we are beloved by a beautiful woman! There's nothing like it, I assure you.

I remember one night—ah! shall I ever forget that night? Methinks not—we had been to a concert, and before retiring to our rooms, we went into the public parlor. No

one was there—we were alone. I had given her several strong hints before that time, regarding the state of my heart, but now, this night, I had determined to tell her all.

She seated herself upon the sofa and I placed myself beside her, and for several minutes, "the beating of our own hearts was all the sound we heard." This growing rather monotonous, I broke the silence with my own dulcet-toned voice.

"Claribel," said I, taking her little hand in mine, "Claribel, there is one thing that I can no longer conceal from thee, and that is my love. Perhaps you have suspected that I loved you, long ere this. I hope you have, for otherwise the shock to such a delicate organization as yours must be terrible. If you feel like fainting—if you experience a sensation of weakness in your spinal column, as though the marrow had all run out, just say so, and I will continue my story in the New York Ledger—excuse me, my dear, I am rather frustrated—I mean to say, that I will finish my declaration to-morrow morning if—"

"Go on, go on," she murmured.

"I will, my darling, I will. I have told thee of my love, O, canst thou, dost thou return it? Wilt thou be mine?"

She raised her glorious eyes to my face.

"How beautiful she looked! her conscious heart
Glowed in her cheek."

I was almost sure of her answer before, but I had the blessed certainty now. With a convulsive sob she buried her face in my bosom, and clasping her white arms around my neck, she answered in a voice between a chuckle and a sob:

"O Alexander, how have I longed for this hour! I do love you, and I will be thine."

"My love, give me thy lips."

We kissed—a lingering "sweetness long drawn out" was that first sweet kiss of love; and while our lips met, I slipped upon her finger the betrothal ring.

Let us drop the curtain. When that scene comes up before my mind's eye, I—well I lose all control of myself. Let us hurry on. I don't feel at all well, I assure you. "John, wet a napkin and bind it around my head. There, that will do;" and now we will return to my friend Althof.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening when he arrived.

"Take a chair, my dear fellow, and help yourself to a cigar."

I don't know whether I have told you that Althof and I were schoolmates? Well, we were, and the friendship that we conceived for each other in our youth had never been allowed to grow cold.

And so we sat there in my parlor, smoking and chatting in a free and easy fashion, Althof telling me all the latest news from P—, who was married and who was soon to be, who was dead and who was ill, and in fact anything and everything that he thought might possibly interest me.

"And now about the ring," said I, when Althof declared that he had told me all there was to tell.

"O yes, the ring, to be sure. I had quite forgotten that. I wish I could find the owner of it."

"What! you told me you bought it."

"O yes, I paid for it, Thornhock, but I wasn't intending to purchase diamonds when I got this."

"Explain yourself, man. What do you mean by your did and your didn't?"

"Well, keep cool, my boy, and I'll tell you all about it, although I've never told the story before, and I wouldn't now except to a particular friend.

"Perhaps you didn't know that I was in town about a fortnight ago?" continued Althof, lighting a fresh cigar.

"No, of course not."

"I meant to drop in and see you, but I'd forgotten both the street and number, and so, as I couldn't call on you, I concluded to visit the theatre and pass the evening there.

"I went to Niblo's, and got a seat in the parquet, with an ancient looking female, who had evidently loved and lost a man, while she was in the bloom of her youth—for I am positively sure she had never been married—sat on my left hand side, while for a pleasing contrast, a magnificent young lady, dressed in the very height of the fashion, sat next me on the right.

"I imagined myself the personification of autumn (my gorgeous red hair answering for the 'glowing tints' of that most poetic season, you know), with the glorious summer on one side, and a bitter cold winter on the other. I believe this to be the most poetic fancy that ever flashed across this brain of mine, Thornhock, and therefore I consider it worthy of mention."

"Yes, yes, very good. Go on."

"O, don't be impatient, my dear fellow. I am going to tell you all about the affair, if

you'll only give me a chance, although I declare, to begin with, that I'd rather not."

"Well, I won't interrupt you again."

"Don't then, lest like Cesario in *Don Quixote*, I go mad," said he, tapping the ashes from his cigar.

"As I said before, the young lady on my right was a magnificent looking creature. If you will allow me to quote from Tom Moore, she seemed

"As one, who knew her influence o'er
All creatures, whatsoe'er they were;"

and when she turned her dark eyes on me, upon my honor, Thornhock, I felt a thrill through every nerve.

"I am not a ladies' man, as you know. I admire the sex, of course, as what reasonable man does not, but I never possessed the power, or the inclination, to make myself extremely agreeable to them. I never courted a woman in my life, and until that night at the theatre, I don't know that I ever saw the woman whom I was extraordinarily desirous to call mine own.

"The young lady was accompanied by an old gentleman, who sat behind a large hooked nose, that resembled a parrot's bill, and who peered out at you through a pair of the blackest and most villainous looking eyes that I think were ever turned upon my face, whom I took to be her father, and I know I wondered at the time, how it could be possible that such a demoniacal looking old sinner *could* be the father of such a beautiful woman.

"Well, I kept one eye on the young lady and the other on the play, giving an occasional glance at the old gentleman's nose, to satisfy myself that he wasn't preparing to hook me up, and carry me off to the abode of the demons.

"Meantime I found that the old gentleman was keeping his 'evil eye' on me, though what he found to interest him in my very uninteresting face was more than I could imagine. I was very sure I had never seen him before, though it was possible that he thought mine a familiar countenance, and was trying to remember where he had seen it. Be this as it might, I became so exceedingly nervous under his steady gaze, that if the first act had been ten minutes longer, I should have been obliged to leave the theatre.

"But the curtain fell, the old gentleman whispered something to the young lady, then arose and went out, and I breathed free again.

"Will you allow me to look at your programme?" I said, turning to the young lady.

"She handed it to me, and as our fingers met, a tear fell from her dark eyes, and splashed upon the paper.

"I'm the most tender-hearted fellow in the world, where there's a woman concerned; and a woman in tears is a sight that I never could look upon unmoved, and especially such a woman as this.

"Lovely and gentle, and distressed—
These charms might tame the fiercest breast,"

and mine isn't one of the fiercest by any means.

"I wanted to inquire into the cause of her sorrow, and I would have been glad to have said something to her of a soothing nature, but I couldn't think of anything to say. My feelings were overcoming me very fast. I tried to read the programme, but a mist came before my eyes, and jumbled the letters all together in one confused mass. Then I looked up at the young lady, and at that moment another tear dropped from the end of that Grecian nose, and inundated her rosy thumb nail. This was too much. I could restrain myself no longer, and so I spoke.

"O, why that tear?" I asked, in a whisper.

"You will notice, Thornhock, that this question wasn't original with me. I had read it somewhere before. Besides, I don't generally express myself in that style in ordinary conversation.

"O, why that tear?"

"O, do not ask me. I—I—cannot tell you. I'm very—I'm very unhappy—hush! he's coming," she whispered, seemingly very much agitated.

"Coming? If you mean your father—"

"Alas! he is not my father."

"Not your father?"

"No, no, thank Heaven for that; but I am—I am in his power!"

"Darn it!" said I, "that's too bad," forgetting in my sympathy for the young lady, the inelegance of my expression; but she didn't appear to notice it. "But can't I help you, my dear young lady?" I asked.

"O, if I could only trust you!" she murmured, looking up into my face through her tears.

"O, if you only would!" I answered. "I feel that I could go through fire and water to serve you, my dear young lady."

"But 'tis useless. There is no hope for

me. You cannot help me. I am in his power. Hush! he comes."

"Well, he did come this time, sure enough, and so I straightened myself back in the seat, and the young lady dried her tears, and if the hooked-nosed gentleman suspected anything, he didn't let his suspicions appear in the expression of his face. On the contrary, he looked quite cheerful, as though the spiritual comfort that he had probably just been imbibing, had proved a comforter indeed.

"Ah, little did he suspect, that, concealed in the folds of the young lady's dress lay her own white hand, clasped in the broad palm of your friend Ned Althof.

"Until the curtain went down on the last act, we remained joined together, palm to palm. She felt that she had my sympathy, I'm sure, and that might have been worth something, even if I could render her no material aid, or at least I thought so.

"The old gentleman went out into the aisle first, the young lady followed, and I came close behind her. She lingered a moment and her companion pressed on into the crowd.

"Now tell me," I whispered, "tell me quickly, O, cannot I help you in some way? If you are in his power, tell me how. Has he any claim upon you? What right—"

"He is my husband," she whispered, in a snickering voice.

"Husband! The d—!"

"She sprang forward and caught the hooked-nosed gentleman's arm, turning back, just once, to give me a roguish smile, before disappearing in the crowd."

"Ha, ha, ha! Althof, you was sold indeed," cried I.

"Sold! Bah, I haven't told you all yet. Of course I realized in a moment that I had made a confounded fool of myself. I don't know why it is, Thornhock, but I never can get the country air out of my clothes. Everybody knows that I came from the country, and this fair damsel knew it, I suppose, the moment she fixed her glorious orbs upon my innocent looking countenance.

"And so," thought I, as I wended my way back to my hotel, "this young lady, being of a mischievous disposition, thought that she would amuse herself a little at the expense of a countryman."

"It didn't trouble me a great deal, because I should probably never see the lady again, and luckily for me, I had no acquaintance

with me to tell the story at home, and so I was pretty well satisfied with myself, notwithstanding the pleasant little game that had been played upon my tender feelings.

"Some people can't enjoy a joke at their own expense, but I can. I remember that I was in excellent humor when I entered my room at the hotel that night. 'If I ever meet that young lady again,' said I, 'we'll laugh over this together,' and I essayed to take out my watch for the purpose of winding it up for the night. Bless you, Thornhock, there was no watch there!

"I assure you, my dear fellow, that I never felt quite so much like a fool as I did when I made that very important discovery. I began to see the *joke* of the thing then, and I saw it much more distinctly, when, jamming my hand (the very hand that had clasped hers!) into my pocket, I found that my pocket-book, containing nearly three hundred dollars had also disappeared!

"I couldn't believe it at first, and I searched every pocket carefully, before I could be satisfied that I had actually been robbed by such a really stylish looking woman."

"O Althof, my boy," cried I, breaking in upon him, "I didn't think you was so verdant, upon my soul, I didn't. But never mind, live and learn. When you've been in the city as long as I have, it won't be so easy to take you in."

"Hold! Just wait till I get through with my story. She didn't make such a 'soft thing' out of me, after all. In searching the second time, I found in the pocket where my money had been, this diamond ring, which must have slipped from her finger while she was fumbling out my pocket-book."

"O, that's the way you bought it?"

"Yes. It cost me, reckoning my watch at eighty dollars, just about three hundred besides, and a jeweller who examined the ring, said that the diamonds were worth three hundred and fifty. So you see I'm only about thirty dollars out of pocket, at the worst."

"And so ends your story."

"Yes, for the present; but if I ever meet the young lady again, I shall offer her the ring at a slight advance on the cost price. And now that I have told my story, let me hear yours, which must be much more pleasant to relate, inasmuch as you have succeeded so much better in your love affairs than I have. And, by the way, when are you to be married?"

"Our wedding is to take place next week.

But before I tell you how I won my love, allow me to introduce you to her. I'll just step across the hall, and learn if she is ready to receive us," said I, rising, and leaving the room.

"I rapped at Claribel's door, and the dear creature opened it.

"Uncle Fernando has come," said she, "and he's very impatient to see you."

She had told me before, that she had an uncle in Baltimore, and we had been expecting him on for several days, and so I hurried in to see the old gentleman, whom I found to be a very genial sort of person, although there was an expression about his face that was anything but prepossessing.

"And now, Claribel," said I, after exchanging civilities with her uncle, "I want to introduce a very dear and valued friend to you. He's in my parlor. Shall I bring him in?"

"By all means, Alexander. I shall always be happy to receive your friends," replied the dear girl. Thinking of Althof's misfortune, and my own happiness, I was obliged to stop and kiss her rosy mouth once or twice before I could tear myself away; but Uncle Fernando didn't see that. Then I ran back into my room.

"Come, Fred, prepare yourself, for I'm about to introduce you to one of the most dazzlingly beautiful women you ever beheld. You think I'm proud of her, I suppose. Well, I am, for she's a woman to be proud of, even if I do say so. Come."

I led the way, and Fred followed close at my heels. I flung open Claribel's door and discovered her standing in the middle of the room, looking as royally beautiful as any queen that I ever had the good fortune to be acquainted with.

"Claribel," said I, advancing with a proud step, "this is—"

"O!" screamed she, falling into Uncle Fernando's arms.

"Bless my eyes!" ejaculated Althof, springing forward. "Hang me if that isn't the one that robbed me of my watch and money!"

"The game's up," said Fernando, dashing out of the room, and bounding down the stairs, and so out into the street.

"O Claribel!" I cried, "what does this mean? It cannot be so, I will not believe that you are—"

"Pshaw! Thornhock, when you've been in the city as long as I have it won't be so easy to take you in," cried Althof, repeating my own words.

But I did not heed him. I ran to Claribel, and throwing my arms around her, begged her to explain it all, as I felt sure that she could.

"Do you know this ring, young lady?" demanded Althof.

"Yes," said Claribel, releasing herself from my embrace, "it is the one you gave me, Alexander."

"O! Fool, fool, fool!" I yelled, snatching the ring, and stamping it under my feet.

"And now you can do with me as you will—I am in your power," said Claribel, addressing Althof.

"No, no, let her go," I groaned. "You are free, Claribel. Go, and never let me see your face again."

"Then our wedding must be postponed, I suppose?"

"Yes, adieu."

We left the room together, and all that night I was busy packing up preparatory to my departure from Gotham. Althof helped me, and the next morning we shook the dust of that city from our feet and returned to P—together. And now I have told *why* our wedding was postponed.

WIDOW HIGGINS AND HER DAUGHTERS.

BY MARGARET VERNE.

CHAPTER I.

THE WIDOW AT HOME.

It was Tuesday morning. It was early September. The weather was soft, sweet and balmy. Widow Higgins sat with her two daughters in her large airy old sitting-room. Everything was quiet, clear and pleasant. The long wooden clock ticked lazily in the corner; the cat, large, gray and sleek, stretched out her paws in the sunshine. The widow sat by the east window, which was full of plants. Opposite her, on a large, patch-covered lounge, the eldest of her daughters, Lydia, sat tying white cotton fringe. She was a pleasant, kind-looking, drabish young lady. Her hair was combed straight from her forehead, and tied with gray ribbons at the back of her neck; her white linen collar was fastened at the throat by a drab bow. She wore a drab dress dotted with the faintest pink. Her slippers were drab, and her feet were resting on a drab ottoman. Her eyes were gray, alas! But sometimes they overreached themselves and grew as blue as larkspur. Her face was very well, upon the whole; and that is enough for me to say about it.

Seated at the widow's right was her second daughter Jeanette, a little dumpy creature, with brown hair and fat red cheeks. She was grasping with both hands, which were as broad as they were long, a huge woollen stocking, and knitting away at the toe of it as though her life depended upon the rapidity of her motions. It was so funny—the stocking was so large, and she was so little! To one experienced in such work, it would have seemed more possible that the stocking had knit her than that she had knit the stocking. As she sat leaned back in the high old-fashioned chair, it was observable that her feet did not reach the floor—only just the tips of her queer bits of boots. This little thing was a second edition of the widow herself; the widow in her youth—fair, brown-eyed, red-lipped and buxom. She was done up in a brown gingham, a funny, belted affair of a dress, ruffled from top to bottom; the skirt opened, displaying a petticoat as wonderful

and rare as home-made embroidery and edging could make it.

The widow was looking pensively out of the window, her fat dimpled hands crossed upon her lap. The widow was in purple, for the reason that she thought purple the best color for a widow; and that she was one she knew very well. She was a nice, fair-looking woman, was Widow Higgins. Upon either side of her round ruddy face a little clump of short black curls hung. If they were false—well, that is neither here nor there. They were becoming to her, at any rate. As I said before, the widow was looking pensively out of the window. To be sure there was little to draw her attention in that direction, but still she looked. She could see the garden fence, and the hop-vines clambering over it, and she could see a flock of turkeys stalking about in the warm sunshine. She could see the great broad-faced sunflowers turned towards the east, and—here let me record it—the widow sighed. Was she thinking of poor Deacon Job sleeping under his two hundred-dollar stone in the village graveyard? Was she? She turned around in her chair and glanced at her daughters. Lydia was working slowly away at her netting. Jeanette was knitting vigorously at the big toe (don't misunderstand me; I'm not speaking of the "big toe" after the manner of the world) of the stocking. The widow sighed again.

"Daughters," she began (she always spoke in this way when she wished to be particularly impressive), "we are very happy here."

A silence followed. Lydia raised her gray eyes to her mother's face, and then dropped them again. Jeanette bent her rosy cheeks closer down to her stocking. The old clock ticked steadily away in the corner.

"Yes," we are very happy here," repeated the widow, not at all put out that her remark had not elicited an answer. "And we will remain so," she continued, solemnly, shaking her head.

"Yes, mother," answered both girls, together, Lydia with a lower drooping of the eyelids, Jeanette with a little jerk of the short round arm.

"Your poor father didn't wish you ever to

be married, daughters. Your father didn't believe much in matrimony. Neither did I, though I can't say as his opinion influenced me a very great deal; but it's well enough to think of these things seriously and well. Your father and I were not very happy in the married state."

The girls shook their heads. They remembered as much.

"We must all live together all our lives," said the widow, solemnly.

"All our lives," repeated Lydia, as though her mother was the rector reading out of the prayer-book, and she was responding.

"Lives," said Jeanette, in a thick, choked way.

"And if one of us should break this compact, she would incur the righteous indignation of those remaining."

"Of those remaining," said Lydia, looking blankly down to the floor.

"Remaining," gasped Jeanette, getting her nose so close to her stocking that she pricked it with her knitting-needles.

"Yes, people are happier single," continued the widow. "Think of the cares that will come upon you if you marry, girls. A married life is one of drudgery; but your father and I were never made for each other, depend upon that. Think of the work a farmer's wife has upon her hands; there are cows to feed and pigs to milk—"

The widow paused. She had said something wrong, though she couldn't tell what.

"Do you mean pigs to milk, mother?" asked Jeanette, gravely, turning her face away.

"No, no, of course not. There are cows to milk, and pigs to feed; there are chickens to turn, and cheeses—"

The widow paused again.

"Is it cheeses to turn?" Jeanette asked, stooping down to pick up her ball of yarn, which she had suddenly dropped.

"Yes, yes; what was I thinking of? Cheeses to turn and chickens to look after; preserves and pickles to be made; apples to be killed and poultry to be dried. And then the children, dear me! the children must be cut up for the winter, and a cartload of pumpkins carried through the cooping-house—" The widow stopped.

"Hooping-cough," suggested Lydia, her eyes getting very blue under her sober lashes.

"Yes, O yes, I see. Where was I? Hooping-cough, mumps canker-rash, measles and picken-chox. What did I say, Jeanette?"

"You said *picken-chox*," was the stifled answer.

"Did I? why, I don't see what ails me. I meant chicken-pox. Yes, to be carried through all these!"

"A cartload of pumpkins, mother?" Lydia asked, looking up.

"No, I didn't say that," the widow answered, a little curtly, growing quite red in the face.

"If you did not, then I was mistaken, that's all."

The widow smiled. She thought it very likely. But she had warned with her subject, absent-minded though she was. So she began again.

"Then where there is a large family of children, it is no small task to keep them well and comfortably clothed. Every fall they must be fitted out for the winter. Webs of cloth have to be made up, and Elder Lang is kept running—"

"*What*, mother?" interrupted the girls, starting up.

"For Lord's sake alive, what *did* I say?" asked the widow, her eyes growing large with fear.

"Why, you said something about Elder Lang," Jeanette answered, laughing in a sly way.

"I—did! I didn't mean to," said the widow, jumping up and walking directly over the cat in her confusion. "There, I've killed that cat—poor kitty! You might've kept out of my way then," she added, spitefully. "A good cat never gets under foot."

The widow went the whole length of the long sitting-room, and paused before Deacon Job's portrait, folding, as she did so, her little puff-balls of hands. And now, what was the widow thinking of? Not of the stiff puritanical face before her, with that strange expression in her eyes and about her mouth? No, that couldn't be it. Of three years before, when the pall was spread in her home; when there was a solemn gathering, and six stout slow-paced men carried the quiet dead from the house? No, no. Let the widow's thoughts alone. She is going to speak.

"Daughters (impressive again), I'm going away from home for a little while, and I want you to remember what I have said to you."

"Going away from home, mother?" asked Jeanette, clutching at her stocking with all ten of her short fat fingers.

"Yes, to be gone—well, I can't tell exactly how long. I shall go in the stage. I am

obliged to go," she added, as she stood, a hesitating way, as she commenced unbuttoning the sleeve of her purple calico dress.

Jenny's eyes twinkled. Lydia worked nervously at her netting.

"I want you to go to bed early to-night," she said, for all the world as though she was talking to two little children. "I am not sure whether I shall be at home or not. Be careful of the fire."

"Yes, mother," Jenny said, clapping her hands joyfully, as she disappeared through the door.

A half hour passed away before the widow returned to the sitting-room. During that period Lydia had laid aside her netting, and Jeanette had finished her knitting.

"How do I look?" she asked, smoothing her short curls down under the tabs of her big purple bonnet. "There (before they could get time to answer her), I wish you would run out to the garden, Jeanette, and get me some flowers. Get a lot of the yellow marigolds—the great double ones—and mix them up with camomile and peppermint. O Jeanette, Jeanette! why don't you wait till I get through telling you? Put in some prince's feather and a few sprigs of lavender. Remember, a good lot of the yellow marigolds."

Now if there was one color in the world that the widow worshipped, it was yellow. She never looked at her purple bonnet but what she wished it was that color, or at her dresses or her shawls but she thought how finely she should look if she could exchange their sombre hue for that of her favorite. But it was of no use; and here the widow was a martyr—in her own opinion at least.

When she was ready for the stage, she made a funny odd figure to look upon. Her bright ruddy face, with its short curls, was hidden away under her huge purple bonnet. About her fat broad shoulders she wore a black silk shawl, which was so large that the fringe touched her heels when she walked. In one hand she carried her bouquet, bright, big and yellow; in the other a tiny parasol-ette, but a little larger over than the crown of her bonnet.

"Do I look well?" she asked, anxiously, glancing over her dumpty shoulder to catch a glimpse at the back of her dress.

"Yes, mother," answered Lydia, rearranging her dress, and tying a square bow under her chin. "But where are you going, and when will you be back? Can't you tell us?"

"O, I'm going away on business. I shall be back as soon as I can. Take good care of everything. Jenny, is that the stage?"

The widow spoke hurriedly. The girls looked at each other silently. Lydia's eyes turned blue several times, and Jeanette held her hands over her mouth as if to keep back something that she wanted to say. But the stage was off at last, carrying the widow, bouquet, bonnet and all. And there was a mystery!

CHAPTER II.

THE WIDOW NOT AT HOME.

As I said in chapter first, the girls, Lydia and Jeanette, looked at each other silently. Were they trying to read each other's thoughts? Perhaps so. But on either side it was a useless task. Lydia's face was grave and unreadable; Jeanette's arch and bright, with a thousand ideas sparkling across it.

Well, the coach rumbled away in the distance; Lydia went slowly and thoughtfully to her chamber; Jeanette waited until she heard her sister ascend the stairs, then made the circuit of the room, listening attentively the while. When the door was closed, and she could hear Lydia walking about overhead, she started directly for the cellar.

It is very queer, I know, to make a heroine of a glutton, but nevertheless, I must confess to it, Jeanette entered the cellar for the sole purpose of eating. By her size and peculiar make-up, the reader will not judge that she had ever been kept upon a half allowance, and so famished by hunger, flew to the larder the moment her mother was away. With all the common eatables of life Miss Jeanette was most plentifully supplied, yet she could not, every day, get a chance at the careful widow's jars of preserves or rare rich cake. But, at this particular period of which I write, Mrs. Higgins had, in her flurry and excitement, left the key of paradise (so Miss Jeanette thought it) behind her.

Is it pleasant to see a pretty girl eat? With spoon in hand, the fat rosy-cheeked Jeanette paused at each and every jar of preserves and jelly in the little private cellar. Spoonful after spoonful of sweets disappeared within her red mouth with a rapidity almost frightful to behold. She showed no partiality; peach, quince, cherry, plum, currant and berry preserve were all the same to her; each swallowed in the same rapid greedy way. While

she was in the midst of this stolen treat, a soft catlike tread sounded upon the stairs. The girl glanced up.

"O Jim!" she exclaimed, starting. "How you frightened me!"

This exclamation was addressed to an urchin of some ten summers, who was crawling stealthily down the stairs, his face aglow with mischief. I may as well say here, as anywhere, that this strange specimen of young America had been kindly taken from the poorhouse by the widow, and bound over to her mercies until he should arrive at the interesting age of twenty-one years. A more wild, mischievous, or contradictory little fellow never teased or tormented three lone women.

"I want some sweets," he said, jerking his little round head about in this way and that as he slid across the cellar towards Jeanette.

"And you'll not get them if you do!" was the retort.

"Then I'll tell."

"Well, tell then."

As she said this, Jim held up something in his hand in the shape of a note, and danced away from her.

"What's that? Where did you get it? Let me see it, Jim, please!" she exclaimed, going eagerly towards him. "I'll give you all the jelly and preserves that you can eat."

"Sartin?" said the boy, inquiringly.

"Yes, only give it to me."

"Let me eat first, then. Give me the spoon."

"No, Jim, let me read while you eat."

But Jim was not to be managed in this way. Making his treasure fast in his pocket with one hand, he grasped the spoon with the other.

"Now give it to me, Jim," she pleaded, holding out her hand coaxingly towards him.

"Bime-by," answered Jim, in a choked voice, a peach-stone lodging in his throat as he spoke. "Ba—rr—chok—"

The boy grew black in the face. Jeanette sprang towards him and caught him up by the heels. She was so short that his nose touched the cellar bottom as she shook him up and down. At this interesting period a note dropped from his pocket.

"Good!" exclaimed Jeanette, dropping Jim to recover as best he could, and grasping the note eagerly. Unfolding the sheet of gilt note-paper, she read as follows:

"DEAR WALTER,—Mother is awfully sorry for me. I can see you to-night. Let us walk together by the old turnpike at eight o'clock. I will not fail to be there. LYDIA."

Jeanette held up her plump hands for a moment in silent amazement, before she turned to Jim, who, by the way, had quite recovered his breath, and was working away at the peaches again.

"When did she give you this, Jim?" she asked, in a quick whisper.

"She! she! I hope you don't call Bill Lennox a she!" exclaimed the boy, holding up his head for a moment above the high stone jar.

"Don't speak so loud. I'll put you into the preserve pot, head over heels, if you don't keep quiet. When did she give you this, and what has Bill Lennox to do about it?"

"Why, didn't he give it to me to give to you, I'd like ter know?"

"What, with Lydia's name signed to it?"

The boy dropped his spoon, gave a little sharp cry, and sprang forward.

"By jingoes, you've got the wrong one!" he said, pulling a soiled and crumpled piece of paper out of his pocket. "Now give me t'other one."

"Wait."

"I won't wait. If you don't give me that I'll carry this up stairs to Liddy," he said, clasping his hard hand tightly about the paper, and pushing firmly along.

Now Jim Hall, the bound boy, had a real true sense of honor in his little hard heart—a trust he never betrayed. The widow's secrets and Jeanette's secrets were all perfectly safe with him. Although he had lost ground in one way, in this case, he had gained it in another.

"Don't, don't carry that up stairs, Jim!" exclaimed Jeanette, catching him by the skirts of his blue woollen frock.

"Then give me the other!"

Jeanette laid the note in his hand. As she did so he started forward.

"Give me my note, Jim, for heaven's sake!" she said, in a supplicating whisper.

"Wont you ever tell of Liddy?"

"Never, never, Jim!"

"Never, sartin? Never so long as you live?"

"Never so long as I live!" she repeated after him, reaching out her hand eagerly.

"O, I'm afraid you will!" said the boy, tantalizingly, drawing the note back. "I like Liddy best," he continued, his face growing

provokingly mischievous. "I guess I'll not give it to you, and then you'll be sure not to tell," he said, edging his way slowly up the stairs.

"O don't, Jim, don't!" cried Jeanette. "I'll send a thousand big-eyed ghosts after you. I'll lock you up in the cellar, and Bill Lennox shall give you a thrashing!"

"A—a—h, but he can't catch me," said the boy, planting both fists firmly into his pockets, and twisting his head upon one side.

"I'll help him, if I live I will; and I'll tell mother what you've been up to. You wait and see if I don't."

The boy looked knowingly down upon her from his perch upon the upper stair. She could gain nothing by threatening him, so she commenced pleading again.

"Please give it to me, Jim; I want it so very much! If you will, I'll buy you a football when I go to the village."

"O, but I don't want any football, 'cause I've got one."

"I'll buy you a sled, then, for winter—a real bright nice one."

"Your mother won't let you," was the wary answer.

"Yes she will; I know she will. Don't bother me, Jim. I can hear some one coming. Give the note to me, quick!"

Jim listened. He could hear Lydia moving about up stairs.

"It's only Liddy," he said, as coolly as ever. "I guess I won't hurry."

"Keep it then, you miserable, good-for-nothing little monkey!" exclaimed Jeanette, springing up the stairs. "I know where Bill Lennox is, and I'll find him myself."

"If you go I'll give it to Liddy; 's true as the world I will."

Jeanette hesitated.

"Will you give it to me, Jim?" she asked, again.

"Do you want it bad?" inquired the boy, diving his hand down deeper than ever into his pocket.

She started forward indignantly.

"Here, take this old piece of paper," said Jim, throwing the note after her, and walking away. "I don't want it."

Jeanette caught up the little missive and tore it open. It ran in this way:

"DARLING JEANETTE,—I saw your mother in the coach about twenty minutes ago. If she remains away from home over night, will it not be possible for us to meet this evening?"

WILLIAM."

Jeanette held the note to her lips for a moment, and then hid it in her bosom.

"I've just as much right to break my promise to mother, as Lydia has," she said to herself, as she went to her room. "Lydia is older than I am, too," she speculated, by way of easing her conscience. "I don't care; I don't believe in being shut up forever in this old house, and growing to be a poor wrinkled old maid!"

Poor, indeed! little, fat, dumpy Jeanette Higgins! You would have done well to glance at your mirror just then! An old maid you might have been, perhaps, but poor—never!

"At any rate, I will see him," she went on, taking a sheet of paper from her writing-desk. "Lydia is going away at eight o'clock—I shall be alone in the house—little Jim will be in bed; everything seems to favor us. If it wasn't right for us to see each other, circumstances wouldn't bring about our meeting so easily."

After this, Jeanette wrote:

"DEAR WILLIAM,—Come and see me at fifteen minutes past eight this evening. I shall be alone, waiting to receive you."

"Thine own, JEANETTE."

With this brief and comprehensive note little Jim Hall was duly despatched to Jeanette's lover, having exacted a promise first, that the sled and football, which she unfortunately mentioned in the cellar, should be forthcoming the next time she went to the village.

I will pass over the long tiresome afternoon that followed, and not particularize as to Lydia's watchful silence, or Jeanette's volubility. The day died out at last, as all such days must die, and together the two girls watched the sun sink away in the red west.

"A beautiful sunset," Lydia said, speaking for the first time for nearly an hour and a half.

"Beautiful!" answered Jeanette, looking into her sister's face to see how unusually flushed and heated it was.

"Isn't there a moon? O yes—what was I thinking of!" Lydia went on, asking and answering the question in the same breath.

Jeanette smiled.

"I believe I'll go out a little while this evening," continued Lydia, trying to appear cool and unconcerned.

"Where?" inquired Jeanette, demurely.

Lydia hesitated.

"O, out to see some of the neighbors. Will you be afraid to stay alone?"

"O no, no!" Jeanette answered, so earnestly that Lydia looked into her face to see what it meant. "I'm never afraid of anything, you know," added Jeanette, by way of explanation, slightly coloring, as she spoke. "I shouldn't mind staying alone all night, I don't believe."

"But I shall be back in good season. You can leave the shed door open when you go to bed, and I will come in that way."

"Yes, but hadn't I better sit up for you?" queried Jeanette, a little slyly.

"No, no—there will be no need of that. Go to bed as usual."

So saying, Lydia turned away and went up to her room. Jeanette hid her face in her white apron and indulged in a hearty silent laugh.

"I guess I will go to bed as usual, and let you go to skylarking off after Walt Saunders! The only difference between us will be that my beau will come to me, and you will go to yours!" she said to herself.

It was nearly eight o'clock before Lydia came down from her chamber, dressed for her walk. Jeanette had begun to grow anxious and nervous in consequence of her tardiness. Her own toilet had been made an hour before, and since that time she had taken her station by the great front window, looking eagerly up and down the road. Silently Lydia stole out of the door, as though every word she exchanged with her sister endangered her cherished secret.

At fifteen minutes past eight, by the old clock in the corner, Mr. William Lennox, Jeanette's lover, made his appearance, and was duly ushered into the sitting-room. He was nearly as short as Jeanette herself, with the dumpiest and queerest of bodies, and the fattest and plumpest of hands and feet. His face was a perfect picture of health and mischief, bright, ruddy and sparkling.

"I was so afraid you wouldn't come!" Jeanette said, leading him, as though he had been a little boy, to a seat upon the lounge, and putting up her tempting mouth for a kiss. "There is such a capital time for us to talk to-night. Mother has gone, Lydia has gone, and Jim is in bed. I'm so glad!"

"And your mother still talks of that wretched compact, doesn't she?" asked Bill, doing his best to draw his fat round face down to a serious length.

"Yes," sighed Jeanette, making the same attempt as had Bill, with the same success. "I'm afraid she always will!"

"And if she does?" queried the anxious lover, brushing the short brown curls up from his forehead.

Jeanette shook her head and pursed up her dainty mouth. Very evidently the young lady did not wish to give her opinion prematurely. Bill whispered something in her ear. She started up with a little theatrical scream, and put both her plump hands over her bright eyes.

"Aint you ashamed, Bill Lennox—I hope you don't think I'll do such a thing as that! It would be a pretty sound to go out, that I had run away!"

Bill laughed. The thought did not seem very appalling to him. But he wisely refrained from mentioning the subject again. A silence followed. Jeanette's hands dropped from her eyes. She nestled as closely as she could to Bill's side, and looked up into his face. Still another silence.

"Do you think we had better?" she asked, softly, under her breath.

It was Bill's turn now to be surprised.

"Better what?" he asked.

"Run away!" gasped Jeanette, as though it cost her a great effort to speak the words.

Now, how this question was settled between the lovers, I shall not say. It was settled, however, I will give that assurance, and after it they had a jolly laughing time of it together.

At one end of the wide, long old-fashioned lounge, where they were sitting, Widow Higgins's willow work-basket, piled high up with sewing, was stationed. At the imminent risk of suffusing Jeanette's cheeks with blushes, Bill commenced in a roguish, teasing way to examine its contents. I don't pretend to say this was gentlemanly upon his part—I don't intend to excuse him for it, but merely to state the fact that he did so, the pretty Jeanette's protestations to the contrary notwithstanding.

"O, I'm sure I don't think that it is a bit pretty of you, Bill," she said, laughing in spite of herself, as he grasped a nightcap of tremendous size, widely and ingeniously ruffled, and commenced drawing it over his head.

"Don't I look like your brother—don't I? don't I, Jeanette?" he exclaimed, laughing until the broad ruffling shook up and down.

"You ought to be ashamed, Bill—you—O, dear, don't!—what if anybody should come?"

This was said in a real earnest, pleading way, for the roguish fellow was at the basket again, and this time was drawing out a white flannel nightgown (the widow's own), broad, capacious and long.

"Do, do let me dress up in this, Jeanette!" he said, wresting the garment away from her, and going to another part of the room to put it on. "There, there!" he said, triumphantly, hopping towards her, first upon one foot and then upon the other.

He did, in fact, cut a most ludicrous figure, with the broad frill of the cap waving about his laughing face, and the long dress dragging upon the floor behind him. Jeanette sank back into a chair nearly convulsed with laughter. The clock struck ten. Just then some one tried the front door.

"O Bill! Bill!" cried Jeanette; "mother has come—she has, indeed! Lydia was coming in at the back door. You must hide—no—don't stop, for Heaven's sake, to unrig yourself—get under the lounge—quick, quick! I must go up stairs to bed. She mustn't find me up!"

With this Jeanette pushed her lover out of sight under the wide patch-covered lounge, and ran out of the room, up to her chamber as fast as her feet could carry her. Undressing herself hastily, she sprang into bed, and commenced breathing loud and heavily, as though in the midst of a deep sleep.

While Jeanette was endeavoring to compose herself, as best she could, another couple made their *entree* into the sitting-room; not the widow, as she had feared and expected, but Lydia and her handsome, dignified lover, Walter Saunders.

"I know this is very bold of me," whispered Lydia, seating herself upon the lounge, and looking timidly about her. "I never should have had the courage to do it, if it hadn't been for you, dear Walter," she continued, resting her head fondly upon his arm.

"Don't whisper, love," was the rejoinder, spoken in a bold free voice. "It is perfectly right for us to meet. Don't try to conceal it."

"I know it—I know it!" protested Lydia, faintly; "but if mother should only find it out! O dear! if Jeanette should happen to come down stairs! Dear, good little Jeanette! I know *she* wouldn't prove false to her promise!"

(Bill Lennox, under the lounge, shrugged his shoulders at this.)

"But haven't you a perfect right to break such a silly, nonsensical compact? I'm sure you have, and there isn't any need of your feeling like a criminal about it, either. You must speak to your mother and sister plainly and rationally."

"You are right, Walter, and I'll certainly do as you say, if my courage doesn't forsake me. I believe I feel more courageous now."

"And if your mother should come?" queried the young man.

Lydia gasped.

"What would you do?"

"I'd be brave, I know I should. Hark—I thought I heard some one!"

She grew very pale as she spoke, and her hands dropped into her lap.

"You are notional, Lydia; you are nervous—there is no one—"

A firm hand at the latch of the front door stopped him.

"Mother—O, it's mother!" whispered Lydia. "What can I do? She mustn't see you to-night, certainly—wait! O Walter, she's coming around the house, and the back door is unfastened! Get under the lounge—quick! I won't forget you!"

So saying, Lydia ran noiselessly from the room, as her sister had done before her, and did not pause until she was in her own little chamber. In a moment more she was undressed and in bed—her eyes closed and her hands folded, as though she had been sleeping for hours.

Lydia's suspicions were correct; the widow had returned, but alas! for the remnant of the compact—not alone! She came cautiously tiptoeing in at the back door, through the back hall to the sitting-room, followed by a spare-faced, nervous little man, who glanced suspiciously about him.

"I wonder what that light was left for?" whispered the widow, anxiously, untying her bonnet. "Sit down on the lounge and rest, Elder Lang. I must see if the girls are in their rooms."

The careful mother proceeded straightway up stairs, leaving her visitor in the dark. Her first visit was to Jeanette's chamber. That pleasant picture of herself was to all human appearances fast asleep. Her breath was long-drawn, loud and heavy—rather too heavy, the widow thought, as she hurried out of the room. Lydia was reposing quietly, as usual, her pale face looking quite attractive among the snowy pillows, and from out the lace of her pretty cap.

"All right here," whispered the widow to herself. "I guess I'll take a look at Jim."

With this she proceeded to the low L chamber. But the boy was not there. His bed was empty. The widow shook her head gravely.

"I shall punish him for this," she said, as she went back to Elder Lang again.

"Is everything as it should be?" was the query of that illustrious personage, as she entered the room.

"Yes, only Jim is away. I don't know what I shall do with him. His only fault is running off when I am gone."

"I thought I heard some one around the house while you were up stairs," said the elder, giving a quick glance towards the window, and moving nervously along on the lounge.

"O, you are mistaken, I am sure you are!" was the emphatic answer. "There isn't any one up or about the house."

Elder Lang was silenced, but not convinced. He motioned her to a seat beside him, saying, as he did so, in a way quite worthy of a younger lover, "I feel quite safe when you are with me!"

The widow could not express her feelings at that happy juncture. She folded her hands and looked straight at the opposite wall. Unlucky direction for her eyes to take! Deacon Job's portrait hung there in all its glory. She turned her face away. She could not bear that straightforward puritanical expression then.

"I have always said, you know, dear elder," began Mrs. Higgins, after a pause, "that if it wasn't perfectly right for me to marry again, it would be revealed to me in some strange mysterious way. I believe it now as firmly as ever. If there is any reason why I should not give my hand to you in the holy bonds of matrimony, there will be a sign given, if it is not until the eleventh hour."

The elder bowed, and looked about him in a frightened way. Elder Lang was a very timid man. He, as well as the widow, had great faith in the "showing of signs," in timely warnings and ghostly visitations.

"Whatever happens, it is all for the best," said the widow, resignedly, looking up into his face.

"Didn't you hear something?" whispered the elder, grasping her hand.

"I—yes, really I thought I did," was the hesitating answer. "Perhaps one of the girls is getting up—coming down stairs, maybe—

They listened breathlessly. Not a sound broke the silence.

"We are nervous."

"Hush! I thought I heard some one breathe," broke in the elder.

In spite of her fright, Widow Higgins smiled. She glanced up at Deacon Job's portrait. How ghostly and solemn it looked! How stern and strange! She gave a little scream of terror, and covered her eyes with her hands.

"Look, look! Look at Deacon Higgins's portrait! I saw it move!"

Elder Lang did look, indeed. His eyes were almost bursting from his head.

"It's moving—it's moving! O good Lord, aid and help us, that portrait is moving!" he whispered, drawing his feet up on the lounge, and trying to hide his head behind the widow. "It acts just as though it was going straight out of the window!"

Mrs. Higgins peeped through her fingers. Back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, like the steady swinging of the old pendulum in the corner, the portrait moved.

"It's a sign, it's a sign! I must never be your wife!" gasped the widow, shuddering.

This was too much for the elder's equanimity. He sprang off from the lounge to the floor, giving a hurried glance at the portrait. It was still moving. He looked about him for a place of refuge, and gave one quick dive under the old lounge. Owing to the thickly populated state of that small territory, his disappearance in that direction was not the easiest thing in the world. But in his desperation he was prepared to surmount any obstacle. He pushed his way ahead—alas, for the widow!—and, upon the principle laid down in the philosophy of our school days, that, "two bodies cannot occupy the same space at the same time," when he gained a position at the end of the lounge, some one lost his at the other. In other words, in pushing himself in, he pushed a little dumpy figure out.

First a white head, then a pair of white shoulders, and lastly, a whole figure in white came before the widow's eyes. She did not speak or cry out as it gained an erect posture and moved slowly towards the table. For a moment she was too frightened for that. She closed her hands tightly by her sides, and shut her lips firmly together. Suddenly the light went out. Under her breath she gave vent to such an expletive as never before issued from her lips: "My God!"

It was still light in the room. The moon came in broadly at the window. The widow's fear lost itself in desperation. She was not courageous, but she spoke because she must do something, and that was the least she could do.

"Are you a sign?" she asked, in a low shaking voice.

"I am!" was the answer, given in a sepulchral tone, as the figure paused in the middle of the room.

"What shall I do?" she gasped.

"Let your daughters marry!"

"Yes, yes. Anything. Yes!"

"Then marry yourself!" continued the voice, solemnly.

She was about to ask another question, but at that moment a terrible groan from Elder Lang sounded through the room.

"O—ah—let me go!" he cried, as though some one was trying to choke him. "I'm in the dev—dev-il's hands. O—ah! O—ah!"

The widow wrung her hands.

"Something—O! O!—let me go! Help! help!"

"Keep quiet, you old dolt!" whispered Walter in Elder Lang's ear. "You shan't be hurt, if you'll keep still. If you don't, I'll choke you. As true as I live, I will!"

The whisper reached the widow's ears. She fully believed that Satan himself had taken possession of her house. She screamed long and loudly at the top of her voice—screamed, screamed, screamed! As a natural consequence, the girls were awakened. They rushed to the top of the stairs together. There was a light step in the hall below; a boyish figure came softly along. Of a sudden it stopped short, and dropped down at the foot of the stairs, giving vent to numberless little sharp hard screams.

"Don't touch me, ghost! don't touch me, ghost!" cried out a terrified voice, which was none other than Jim Hall's. "O, don't touch me. I'll tell. I'll tell. It was me that wiggled the portrait—it was me—it was me. I tied a string round it and pulled the string out of the window, and kept pulling. O don't, don't, don't, ghost! O—o—o!"

The ghost, I may as well say here as anywhere, that terrified Jim so, was Bill Lennox hidden behind the front hall-door. When the widow screamed he started forward, and in that way was espied by the roguish bound-boy, who was at that moment stealing in from playing his capers on the widow. The noise in the hall started the widow and

Elder Lang again. Another series of screams came from the sitting-room.

"I'm going down," whispered Lydia, grasping Jeanette by the arm.

She started ahead, but when she was half way down stairs, caught sight of the little dumpy figure in white. This was enough. She joined her voice in the concert of sounds and sprang forward, tumbling over Jim, who was lying on the lower landing, half dead with fright. Supposing the ghost was attacking him in good earnest, the boy bellowed at the top of his voice.

"Hush, for Heaven's sake!" cried some one from the sitting-room, in a calm firm tone.

Lydia recognized the voice, and went tremblingly forward.

"You'll raise the neighbors."

In the meantime, Jeanette had made an attempt to follow her sister, but when she gained the foot of the stairs, the horror-stricken Jim impeded her progress by striking and kicking her with all his might.

"If you are a ghost, I'll fight you. O, I'm scared—bla—a—r! O, O, O, let me go! I did wiggle the picture!" he cried, writhing about like a snake.

"Let her go, or I'll break every bone in your body!" he said, taking Jim by the hair. Another series of screams and bleats followed.

"I'm so scared!" whispered Jeanette.

"I guess, by the sound, there are a number of persons in the same condition," whispered Bill, comically.

Suddenly a light flashed out from the sitting-room. Walter Saunders was the only one who had his senses about him. A light, and what was revealed! The widow standing in the middle of the floor, grasping with both hands the back of a chair, her mouth wide open, her eyes staring. Elder Lang, with his head protruding from under the lounge, like a turtle from its shell. Walter Saunders, with one arm around Lydia, who was wrapped up in a chintz bed-spread.

"What is it?" asked the widow.

"Sure enough, what is it?" answered Walter, biting his lip to suppress his merriment. "Let us look in the hall."

As he said this, a figure whisked by the sitting-room door.

"The ghost!" cried the widow, as he sprang after it and caught it by its very unghostly raiment, the white flannel night gown.

"O!—ah!" cried the elder, popping his head under the lounge.

"Unrobe yourself, for Heaven's sake, Bill!" said Walter, beginning to comprehend the part of the play which he had not seen.

"Bill Lennox!" said the widow, faintly. "O dear! dear!"

The elder's head made its appearance again from under the lounge.

"Who is in the hall?" inquired Lydia, blushing as she remembered, for the first time, the way in which she was dressed.

"That's what I propose learning at once," replied Walter, taking up the lamp and going forward, followed by the whole party, Elder Lang among the number, for he was afraid to stay alone.

Little Jim was sitting on the floor, with

his hands covering up his eyes, gasping with fright.

"O, I wiggled the portrait!" he began again, as Walter took him by the collar.

From the top of the stairs Jeanette was looking laughingly down upon the group, comprehending just enough of the whole to know that something excessively funny had happened. At Walter's suggestion they returned to the sitting-room, and each one gave a faithful account of his personal part in this Comedy of Errors, Jim Hall included among the number.

And so the night wore away, and the bright September morning that followed found the "Family Compact" broken, the poor dead deacon to the contrary, nevertheless. Here the story ends.

"With what Measure ye Mete."

BY HESTER EARLE.

PART SECOND.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOUSEKEEPER.

IT is to be regretted that those benignant fairies who, "in the good old times" of which so much is heard, made a specialty of indulging wishes, have retired from business. Otherwise Agatha's wish might have got some attention.

Mrs. Colbraith, however, was not only coming, but came. On the day appointed she entered upon the duties belonging to her situation. The same day her son became a pupil at the village high school. Victor would have received his young comrade with open arms, but a certain reticence on the part of the latter prevented their becoming very intimate.

Aaron immediately applied himself to study with feverish energy, refusing all of Vic's good-natured invitations to join driving, or coasting, or skating parties.

"I can't spare the time," was his invariable answer; and at last Vic gave up inviting him.

"If I were placed as you are it would be different," Aaron said, once. "When you are grown up you have only to step into a fortune and enjoy it; but I have got all that to gain for myself, or else be a hewer of wood and drawer of water all my days. The position may have its advantages, but it is without attractions for me. I want to be something above a hewer of wood and drawer of water, and it is only by improving this chance for an education, which your father has generously given me, that I can hope to come up higher."

It chanced that Mr. Wilbraham had approached unseen, in time to hear the concluding part of this speech. He now interposed with the approving remark, "That's the stuff that men are made of, my boy. Excelsior is a good motto for young people." Intent upon the business of the hour, he passed on then, yet he did not forget what he had heard.

"There's one to your credit," laughed Vic. "Well, go in and win. I shall look to see you at the top of the heap yet."

The two separated thereupon, Vic with some lazy ideas floating in his brain about the possibilities lying in the way of those who choose to seize upon them, and a momentary dwelling upon the thought that "it would be splendid, by Jove, to beat Ron at his own game;" momentary only, for with the recollection of his anticipated evening's pleasure, the unwonted reflection was quite lost sight of.

Mrs. Wilbraham at first met the new housekeeper with a bristly outside, but she soon became reconciled to the innovation. Artful sympathy and well-chosen flattery won her over. The invalid was speedily convinced that no one understood her so well as Mrs. Colbraith.

"These daily baths tire you too much, feeble as you are," said that sympathizing attendant, one morning when the invalid had remarked that she supposed it was time for her bath.

"I know it; but Mr. Wilbraham has always insisted upon my taking them," was the reply.

"I think you ought to be the best judge of what you can bear."

"So I ought."

And from that time the daily bath became occasional, subject to the caprice of the patient. So of the morning airing, which, in pleasant weather, her husband had never allowed her to miss, sometimes carrying her out in his arms when she was unable, or believed herself so, to walk. Sue's native indolence had always been opposed to these hygienic measures, and now, abetted by Mrs. Colbraith, she rebelled against them. Mr. Wilbraham protested until his wife stung him by saying that he must want her to die, since he insisted upon her doing things so much beyond her strength, and after that he allowed her to have her own way, which was always Mrs. Colbraith's way, too, for it was wonderful how entirely they agreed.

The housekeeper had the tact, moreover, to appease the servants whom, at first, she had found decidedly hostile in inclination. A smooth tongue, and indulgences artfully granted, soon effected this. Victor was too good-natured to range himself in opposition to any one, unless he saw good cause for doing so, and he found nothing to complain of in Mrs. Colbraith.

"She mayn't be just the sort of person we should wish our aunt or our grandmother to be, but she does excellently well as a housekeeper, and I don't see why you dislike her so much, Aggie," he said, one day.

For Agatha had never become reconciled to the woman, against whom all the girl's strongest feelings rose up in rebellion. It might be prejudice. She feared it was, but was unable in the least degree to overcome it. She, alone, of all in the house, had no faith in Mrs. Colbraith. While treating that woman with marked civility, Agatha yet felt herself impelled to keep a vigilant watch upon the new housekeeper's proceedings.

It was not long before Mr. Wilbraham proposed sending his daughter to a boarding school.

"I hoped, papa," said Agatha, "that you would be satisfied with the improvement I am making here. I am trying hard, I am sure."

"I know you are, my girl, but Miss Chandler's French would hardly pass for such in Paris, I think, and Mr. Cassiday's German is not much better. Then, too, your music teacher's style is altogether too stunning for my ear. If it is worth while to learn these things at all, it is worth while to do so in the best manner. Do you not think so, Aggie?"

"I suppose so, but—"

"Well, my dear?"

"It is so sudden."

"To you, perhaps, but you will have time to get used to the idea."

"Then I do not like leaving mamma. It seems to me that she has not been so well lately. If I were to go away and anything should happen—"

She was unable to complete her sentence, but burst into tears.

"You are alarming yourself unnecessarily," said Mr. Wilbraham. "I do not think mamma is any worse than she has been for years, but I will consult Dr. Layard before we decide upon your going. If he pronounces your fears unfounded, will you be satisfied then?"

"Yes," was the hesitating answer. "But, papa, tell me, is this plan—that of my going to school, I mean—yours—or—Mrs. Colbraith's?"

"What is it to Mrs. Colbraith?" demanded Mr. Wilbraham, with some sharpness.

"I don't know," replied Agatha, confused by his tone—an unusual one for him to use to her.

"It is generally best to have some reasons for one's words—at least when they accuse another, inferentially, of—but there, my dear, don't cry. We will have Dr. Layard in to-day, and if you go to school, it will be because I wish it. Does that satisfy you?"

"Yes, papa."

Their conversation had been in the library. Mr. Wilbraham went out when it was ended, and Agatha sat alone thinking it over and sobbing quietly. Presently Aaron Colbraith came in for a book which he wanted for reference in writing his theme. Agatha wiped her eyes furtively, and hoped he would not see that she had been crying. But Aaron was sharp-sighted.

"What is the matter?" he asked. "Has my mother—"

Agatha looked up in quick surprise, and the boy stopped confused; but he recovered himself instantly. "Has my mother been in here lately? I can't find her anywhere."

"No, I have not seen her," said Agatha.

"Miss Colbraith? She's speaking with Mr. Wilbraham in the back parlor," interposed one of the housemaids, who, coming in to dust the room, had overheard Aaron's question. "I guess it's somethin' about Miss Aggie's going away to school, from what I heerd. I genally takes that room afore this one, but the coast wan't clear there this time, so I came away."

"Are you employed here to report conversations, or to do housework?" asked Aaron, loftily.

"I wan't employed by you to do neither!" the girl flung out, with a toss of her head.

"That's lucky for you!" muttered Aaron, walking away with the book he had come for.

"It is Mrs. Colbraith's plan," thought Agatha, with rising anger. And she mentally resolved that, whatever pain it would cost her to leave home, she would make no further objection to the arrangement. To this resolution she strictly adhered. Dr. Layard's report proved favorable, and nothing remained but to provide the necessary outfit, which, under Mrs. Colbraith's efficient

superintendence, was soon progressing quite rapidly.

At school Aaron Colbraith's application to study produced its legitimate results. His quick intellect balked at nothing. His progress became a matter of surprise to teacher and scholars. Among the latter he made no effort to attach himself to any. Perhaps he thought of friends as of pleasures—that he had no time for them. His ordinary manner was brooding and reserved, though he could talk fluently when he chose, and with perfect command of all his faculties. This reserve was generally attributed to pride, and he was rather admired for it, as well as for the fame of his exploit in the matter of the robbery (concerning which, we may be expected to say of the remaining robber that he was duly tried and punished; this, so far as our story goes, being the end of him); likewise for his "smartness," so called in the vernacular—we are speaking of Aaron again now. His moral forces, like Saul's armor when David was arrayed therein, had not yet been "proved."

The Rev. Mr. Leonardson, however, expressed great hopes of the boy in this respect.

"I have talked with him considerably," said that faithful minister, to Mr. Wilbraham, "and I have strong faith that he will be brought into the fold. We shall have him in the ministry yet. It is just such persistent, untiring workers that the church needs."

So, in the interests of the church, and, undoubtedly, in the hope of saving a soul, the excellent minister treated this promising student with marked friendliness, inviting him often to the parsonage, where—when the stripling condescended to come—pretty Grace Leonardson helped to entertain the visitor, dropping, birdlike, a grain here and there of that good seed which it was her father's desire to sow broadcast for the future harvest. Pretty Grace Leonardson, we have said, but the phrase falls deplorably to do justice to the girl's winning grace and beauty. So, perhaps, would a paragraph of description, which we are not going to write just now. She and Agatha had always been "great friends," in schoolgirl phrase, and the same was true of her brother Wirt Leonardson and Victor. Just before Agatha left home Grace gave her friend a little farewell party. The evening proved unfavorable, much to the regret of all concerned. It had been raining hard all day, softening the snow which lay upon the ground late this year,

even for a Maine spring. Nearly all those invited contrived to be present, however, and a gay evening ensued. For once, Aaron Colbraith seemed to have forgotten his brooding reserve, or pride, or whatever it might be, appearing in the new character of a squire of dames (small ones). In this, as in everything which he undertook, he achieved a marked success.

"Did you ever see a nautilus out of his shell?" Wirt Leonardson asked Vic, with a glance in Aaron's direction.

"I take it that I have," laughed Vic. "It is very obliging of the nautilus."

"The girls all seem to think so," retorted Wirt, with a shrug of the shoulders. But the next moment, seeing that Agatha had separated herself from the group surrounding Aaron, he crossed over and began a lively conversation with her.

About midnight the party broke up, and it was nearly an hour later before Vic's "team," which had acted well its part in restoring "the girls" to their homes, was ready to undertake that service for Agatha. Aaron was to ride with them, and the three set off together.

"What is that noise?" asked Agatha, hearing a crashing sound mingling with the roar of water.

"The ice is going out of the river," said Aaron.

A portion of their road lay along the river's bank. When they reached this part of their way they found that it was flooded with water. The ice had formed a jam below, and the water, thus walled in, was rising with great rapidity.

"I guess Selim will take us through," said Vic.

And such seemed to be the purpose of the animal. He plunged in and struggled on nobly until half way across, when he ran against a piece of floating timber, which in the darkness they could not see. This frightened the horse so much that he made a sudden bound, dashing the sleigh against the log, and freeing himself from both; after which exploit he galloped madly homeward.

"It's a very unhandsome thing to desert your friends in that way, Selim," Vic called after the flying steed. Then, ruefully to his sister, "Can you swim, Aggie?"

"Do you take care of yourself and I'll bring Agatha through," said Aaron, lifting her to his shoulder. "To the hill yonder. Quick, or the water will be over our heads!"

It was rising higher every moment, as they fled before it—a swirling hungry tide. The struggle was a fearful one, but Aaron was as good as his word, and brought Agatha through. Victor, less used to physical exertion, had had all he could do to come through himself to the higher land beyond.

"You seem fated to do us good, Aaron," said Agatha, when she had been set down, not upon dry ground, for that would have been hard to find with the rain still pouring; but it *was* ground, and not water.

"Do I?" returned Aaron, broodingly.

"All safe?" asked Victor, who, guided by their voices, came up with them from a point further down. "Let's count noses: one, two, three. All right."

They had still a walk of half a mile before them, but that was quickly accomplished. As they approached the house by a side entrance, Agatha saw that there was a light in the library. Bidding the boys make haste to get off their wet clothes, she, wet and cold herself, went on to the library, eager to share with papa the comforts of its fire; but she found the door locked.

"Papa," she called, "will you not let me come in? I am wet and cold."

"Not now, my child. I am very busy. There is a fire in your mother's room."

Agatha turned back and went up stairs. She met Vic just coming out of her mother's room.

"You'll find cold comfort here, Ag," he said. "The fire is all burned down. Why didn't you go into the library?"

"Papa was busy."

"I should think he might let you in, if he was. I'd go down to the kitchen, if I were you. I guess you'll find a fire there."

"I believe I will," said Agatha.

So she crept down the thickly matted stairs once more, seeking the warmth of which her chilled frame was sadly in need. When she reached the last stair of the flight she heard the library door open softly, and thought, "Now papa will let me in there."

But the next moment, with a wildly beating heart, she sped back, grasping the stair-railing in her ascent, and feeling as if she would never be at the top; just as sometimes in a dream we struggle mightily with some task of desperate necessity and make no headway in it. Her room was reached at last, though, and she crept shivering to bed, where she lay sobbing and miserable, and very cold. This is what she had seen, standing at the

foot of the stairs: Mrs. Colbraith coming out of the library, and her father, who held the woman's hand, detaining her to press a kiss upon her lips.

CHAPTER V.

SINNING AND ITS FRUITS.

THOUGH unconsciously of the sobbing, shivering child up stairs, Mr. Wilbraham's reflections were not of the pleasantest as he turned back into the library, and sat glowering over the fire. The very embers, sullen and blackening, seemed to reproach him. He knew that, in the way upon which he was entering, lay cruel wrongs to those who were dearest to him.

"Why did that woman come here?" he asked himself, sternly. "And why do I not send her away now? It is not too late yet."

Deep into the night he pondered upon the course before him. He was not one to yield to wrong-doing without suffering, nor yet without struggling against it. To "enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season," was, he knew, to bind himself upon the wheel of remorse. He would turn back before it was too late. If only Sue had been like other women, if he could have hoped for any help from her, he felt that his task would have been comparatively easy. But he had only himself to depend upon—and God. Then he prayed for strength to overcome his weakness, after which he was, perhaps, too ready to leave the work to God alone. He may have felt that there was a saving virtue in his prayer. At any rate, upon further reflection he decided it to be unnecessary that Mrs. Colbraith should go. Sue had got used to her, and would not give her up willingly. Then he was interested in Aaron, and liked to have him in the house. Moreover, Mrs. Colbraith had proved herself an efficient housekeeper, and he could give no sufficient reason for dismissing her, unless, indeed, he were to confess that he dared not trust himself, which he was far from ready to do. Yes, Mrs. Colbraith must stay, but he would avoid her with the utmost vigilance. He would dismiss his agent at the works, and take the whole care of the business upon himself. He would give himself no leisure for weakness or trifling. At home—for a man can't always be at his business, however actively he pursue it—he would devote himself with sedulous attention to Sue. He was almost sorry that Agatha was going away.

If the arrangements for this had not been so nearly complete, he would have kept her at home even now. But he was not one to change his course easily when once it had been adopted. To a certain extent he was an obstinate man. It was for Aggie's good; that he had settled with himself in the outset. He could not keep her at home now without a confession, at least to himself, of weakness, and he had vowed that he would not be weak.

Nevertheless, when he found Aggie pale and ill the following morning—she had taken cold the night before—he told her that he did not believe she would be able to go. But Agatha insisted that she should be well in a day or two, and would not hear of her departure being put off. She felt that she could not stay at home, with that woman in the house, and she dared not demand the housekeeper's dismissal.

Accordingly, on the day appointed, Agatha went. She had prayed her own prayer for strength, and that, joined to strenuous effort on her own part, enabled her to make her adieux with quite a show of fortitude. To Aaron she had said a simple "good-by" over night. She took leave of her mother up stairs, and of the servants in the kitchen. Her father and Vic were going with her to the depot. Mrs. Colbraith, whom she had hoped to avoid, came out to the door and offered her hand. Agatha was going to pretend not to see it, but Vic made that impossible by saying, "See, Aggie, Mrs. Colbraith wants to say 'good-by' to you."

So the girl was obliged to go away with the nauseous feeling of Mrs. Colbraith's fat moist hand in hers, and a kiss from those dreaded lips upon her cheeks. This was the hardest to bear of all, but it was quickly over. If only the suffering and misery which that woman caused her could have been as brief, Aggie might soon have got back her old light-heartedness; but the pain and a great dread went with her.

Agatha, then, was gone, and Mrs. Colbraith stayed. I will not attempt any disguises about the latter. She was a bold bad woman, who, while alluring, had yet the art to appear innocent and unsuspecting. That such women exist, is deeply to be lamented. That homes are made unhappy and pure lives embittered by their means, is as sad as it is true.

With what wiles Mr. Wilbraham, in spite of his resolves, was led into this woman's

toils, I have neither the inclination nor the patience to relate. The bare fact is sufficient. We will let the details go.

Mrs. Wilbraham, meanwhile, was selfishly cultivating her indolence and debility, aided and abetted therein by Mrs. Colbraith. The invalid's exactions made it impossible for her husband to carry out his plan of dismissing his agent, and taking the whole business upon himself. After Agatha left home there were days when Mrs. Wilbraham would not hear of his leaving the house. Yet he was often banished from her room for some fancied offence, and her maid summoned in his place. Her whims and exactions were certainly of a character to exhaust the most enduring patience. Mr. Wilbraham, however, was uniformly indulgent to his wife, but when banished from her presence he learned to find consolation with Mrs. Colbraith. God knows he needed consolation, yet he did not on that account justify himself for seeking it from such a source. No one knew better than Mr. Wilbraham the fallacy of making suffering an excuse for sinning.

A year passed without bringing much change. Aaron and Victor were now sitting for college. Agatha had not been home since she went away. She liked at the school where she had been placed. Her letters home were cheerful and marked by constant improvement.

There was no apparent change in Mrs. Wilbraham, though inevitably her life forces were becoming sapped by the course she pursued. It had been a long while now since she attempted doing anything for herself. If she wished to cross the room even, she must have help.

One day she had been unusually hard to please, dismissing first her husband, then her maid, then Mrs. Colbraith, in petulant anger; and at nightfall she was left alone. Something suggested that this was the anniversary of her wedding day, and with the recollection came reflections of a sort that she was quite unused to. Perhaps the air of that May evening was unwontedly exhilarating; or it maybe that some grain of truth, dropped into her mind in days long past, had suddenly germinated. She thought of her husband's long-suffering, and of her own fretfulness through many days and years—thought of it with regret for her own part, with fond gratitude for his. Then she reviewed her wasted life, and wished that she

had strength to make the future different. "I once heard," she thought, smiling faintly, "of a boy that lifted a calf every day until it became an ox. I wonder if I might not become quite strong by taking a little exercise every day, and increasing the amount constantly? What a surprise it would be to Jesse if I should walk down stairs some evening when he thought me unable to stir out of my room!"

The novelty of the idea pleased her, but a patient waiting for results of a slow growth was foreign to her character. The longer she dwelt upon the thought of surprising her husband, the more eager she became for attempting it. She got up, and supporting herself by a chairback, worked her way to the bureau, one of whose drawers she opened. There was her bridal dress and the flowers she had worn with it. She took it out, shook out its folds, and hung it across a chair. Then, fatigued with the unwonted effort, she lay down to rest. But her feelings were too much stirred to permit her to lie long in quiet. She got up presently, and, sitting before her mirror, arranged her hair, adding with trembling fingers the flowers belonging to her bridal toilet.

How the hopes and emotions of eighteen years before came back to her as she did so! She had meant to be a fond and loving wife. Instead of that, she had been selfish and hateful. She saw it all now, and wondered at her husband's forbearance. To-night she would ask her husband's forgiveness, and thank him for having been so patient with her waywardness. Her unwonted excitement stirred the soft color in her delicate cheeks, making her almost as lovely as in her early girlhood.

After another respite she dressed herself in her bridal white. She was very tired when this was done, and half repented of what she had undertaken. She dared not stop for further rest, lest her courage should forsake her, now that the ordeal was so near. With faltering steps she reached the stairs, and supported herself in descending by clinging to the balustrade. From the parlor she heard a murmur of voices, and felt a momentary regret that she would not find Jesse alone. It was too late to retreat now, however. She had not strength to reascend the stairs; so she crept softly to the parlor door, opened it noiselessly, intent upon surprising her husband, and found herself surprised by what she saw. Mr. Wilbraham and Mrs.

Colbraith were sitting together, she leaning upon him heavily, he bending down to kiss her.

A gasp and a gurgling sound, succeeded by the fall of some object, called the attention of the pair.

"My God, Sue!" groaned Mr. Wilbraham, starting to his feet, and lifting up the wronged wife, from whose mouth drops of blood were trickling, and whose face was like the face of the dead. Back to the room, whence in such weakness it had just come on its errand of reconciliation, the white-robed figure was carried. It was laid upon a sofa. There was a gasp and a flutter of the heart, and then utter stillness.

"She has fainted," said Mrs. Colbraith, at Mr. Wilbraham's elbow. "I have sent for Dr. Layard. You had better let me rub her."

"Go away!" commanded the man, in a deep stern voice.

In her retreat she was met by Vic, who excitedly demanded what had happened.

"Your mother came down stairs alone. I don't see what made her do it. She fell when she got to the parlor door. I'm afraid it has killed her."

The same story was told to Dr. Layard, who came soon afterward. Came uselessly, for the case had gone beyond his province. Doctors are not for the dead.

"Dead!" Mr. Wilbraham had known that that would be the word. Dead! and his treachery had killed her. Almost as if it were written out before him, he could read the purpose with which she had put on her bridal attire and dragged herself down stairs to seek him—her husband. The tender feelings of a gone-by time had returned to her, only to be driven back in a congealing current upon her heart. The man's sin had found him out, and his punishment was almost greater than he could bear. The way of the transgressor is hard.

Agatha came home from school. It seemed to Mr. Wilbraham that her eyes had an accusing look when he first met their mournful glance, though that might have been his fancy. It was pitiful to see her grief, but he had no comfort to offer her. He had none for himself. He saw that Victor and Agatha turned to each other rather than to him for support—saw it with a pang—yet felt it was right that it should be so. Upon these two their bereavement, as is inevitable with a first grief, fell with stunning force. But

youth is strong and nature helpful. Every body was very kind—the Leonardsons most of all. They had never felt so near to their pastor as now, had never valued the friendship of Wirt and Grace so much.

Aaron Colbraith was kind, too, but rather like one who does not wish to fall short of what is expected from him, than with the spontaneous sympathy of the Leonardsons. Victor and Agatha acknowledged themselves obliged to him, but did not feel much drawn towards him on that account.

CHAPTER VI.

PRUDENCE AND PRODIGAMTY.

SHARP grief, like an edge tool, becomes blunted with use, and all the tendencies of a busy life are sedative in their effects. Mr. Wilbraham's case was no exceptional one in these respects. For a long time his agent was necessarily absent, thus compelling the proprietor of the slate works to apply himself closely to business. His dead was buried out of his sight, and but for the vacancy up stairs, life went on in its old familiar courses.

At first Mrs. Colbraith discreetly avoided him. Then, when she began sometimes to come in his way by chance, it was always with a grieved repentant face, from which he inferred that she, too, had suffered from remorse. At last she asked to speak with him, and, being allowed the opportunity, told him that "she thought she ought to go away. She could never hope to get back the peace of mind which she had forfeited, but in some other place, by a life of charity and good works—"

Here the repentant Magdalen broke down utterly, and covered her face with her hands.

If her proposal had come some weeks before, Mr. Wilbraham would have acquiesced in her going with stern severity. Now he was able to remember that he had wronged another woman beside his wife, and that the other was still living. Perhaps he was even conscious that she was a handsome and very fascinating woman, though I cannot say positively as to that.

"You had better stay," he said, taking one of the weeping penitent's hands. "You are used to the house. I should have difficulty in finding any one to fill your place."

"If you really wish it; but I thought—I feared—that you were thinking hard of me—

for what—O dear! You can never know how much I have suffered."

"I have not to blame you, only myself for what has happened. We shall not always feel as we do now, and I prefer that you should stay."

He dropped the hand he had taken, and began walking from window to window of the library, his face working painfully. Mrs. Colbraith, with her eyes still shaded with one hand—whose fingers were conveniently parted—watched him furtively, and divined that it was not wholly by sorrow for the irrevocable past that he was shaken. Perhaps she found the thought an agreeable one, for she repeated it to herself with emphasis, as she rose to leave the room. Mr. Wilbraham, seeing that she was going, approached her with extended hand.

"We may still be friends," he said, with some feeling.

"Yes," she replied, softly.

And so their interview ended.

Agatha stayed at home until September, and then went back to school. About the same time Victor and Aaron were placed at college, Mr. Wilbraham supplying funds for both. Wirt Leonardson accompanied them, and the three entered the same class.

At college, as he had done at school, Aaron Colbraith distinguished himself. He was regarded as the best worker and strongest thinker of his class. Wirt Leonardson had a fair standing, too, though it was held rather by quickness of intellect than by hard study. Victor managed to keep along somehow. True to his old principles, he never stood in the way of those who wanted the uppermost places. If he did not accomplish much study, he contrived to spend a good deal of money—thus proving that he fully understood what belongs to the position of a rich man's son. His allowance was double that which Aaron had consented to receive, yet it always happened that before quarter-day came around, a portion of Colbraith's funds had passed into Vic's hands.

"It's too bad, Ron, I know," Vic said once, "but that last supper cleaned me out completely. I never could keep money in my pocket, without its burning through, and you always have plenty. I don't see how you manage it."

"I have but little use for money. One can't work and play too, and work is the only thing for a fellow in my position. It's different with you, of course. You can have

all the money you want for the asking. What is only prudence in me would be niggardliness in you. I like to hear the boys telling what an open-handed, generous chap you are, and I'd be the same, if I could afford it. That sentiment of King Sardanapalus was not so bad, after all—'Eat, drink and love. The rest's not worth a fillip'—not so bad, I mean, for those who can afford to carry it out. It won't do for poor folks, though. We've got to work in order to eat and drink, and as for love, that is not to be thought of until we are able to invest ourselves with gilded attractions, and for that we must work too."

"I'm not so sure that Grace Leonardson would agree to that last sentiment of yours."

"Why not? She is like all the rest of womankind, I suppose," returned Aaron, walking to the window, and standing with his back to Victor while he went on speaking. "Grace is a pretty little girl, and I rather like her. I've no time for falling in love, though, and shall not have for the next fifteen years. Before a quarter of that time has passed, she'll be Mrs. somebody—with a baby or two, most likely. These sweet, merry, saintly girls always marry young, and make very good wives too, I believe."

"You have thought more upon the subject than I should have supposed," rejoined Victor, with a laugh.

Aaron looked intently out of the window a moment before replying.

"I have thought of it within the last three minutes, and have spoken out my thoughts to the utmost," he said, then. "Now about your affairs. If you need more money before your remittance comes, let me know. You must not stint yourself, of course. It is

well known here that your father is one of the nobs, and people don't like close-fistedness in a fellow of your sort."

"You're a trump, Ron. I'll make it even for you some day. You can count it as a casting of your bread on the waters, you know. I'm glad you don't think it necessary to preach what you practise. Half the A. No. 1's, who are as clear of getting into any scrapes as a fish is of yoking himself to a farmer's plow, could never have let such an opening for a sermon go by."

He sauntered off as he spoke, singing a jolly refrain, in a tone to match:

"Then let the wide world wag as it will,

I'll be gay and happy still,

Gay and happy, gay and happy,

I'll be gay and happy still."

Perhaps Aaron's was not the best sort of counsel for a youth like Victor. Certainly it was not such as Agatha would have wished her brother to listen to. She, in her letters, was constantly trying to inspire him with some nobler aims than the mere living for pleasure, but all such admonitions fell upon him about as water does upon a polished surface. So if Aaron had given sermons instead of such counsel as we have heard from him, it is probable that both counsel and counsellor would have appeared highly obnoxious to the listener.

As it was, though not on terms of close intimacy, Victor had a high respect for Aaron. He felt a certain pride, too, in the distinction which his classmate was achieving. He liked to hear people speak of the figure young Colbraith was sure to make in the world, believing in that rising luminary as fully as the luminary believed in himself; perhaps more fully.



"With what Measure ye Mete."

BY HESTER EARLE.

PART THIRD.

CHAPTER VII.

FILLING THE VACANCY.

IT was not many months after Mrs. Wilbraham's death when, like the war-horse which smelleth the battle afar off, the gossip-mongers of Eastberg began to scent a far-off event, which, however, it was too early to speak of save in ambiguous whisperings. Divested of their ambiguity, these auguries foretold that Mr. Wilbraham would marry his housekeeper.

For once the social augurs were right. Mrs. Colbraith had found no difficulty in re-establishing her influence over that gentleman. He believed that he had wronged her, and now he was free to repair that wrong. There was no indecent haste. They waited something more than a year from the time of Sue's death, and then they were quietly married.

The event, though pregnant with misery, was no surprise to Agatha. It was what she had dreaded ever since the thought occurred to her that her father was free to marry again. She had prayed that it might not be permitted—had almost believed that if it were permitted she could never pray again; could never again trust to the compassion of an all-ruling God. Futile the effort to array a puny human will against the will of the Infinite. Agatha owned it so, when what she had dreaded became inevitable, and strove for patience to bear her burden uncomplainingly.

To Victor, the news of his father's marriage came like a thunderbolt. His anger waxed hot at the indignity of such a connection. With the letter conveying the intelligence in his hand, he made a rush for Aaron's room, looking very much, at his entrance, as if he meditated a violent onslaught upon that peaceful student.

"So you have heard the news?" said Aaron, quietly.

"How long have you known it?"

"Since yesterday."

"Why didn't you tell me, pray?"

"I thought you would hear it soon enough—"

"Too soon by half. I thought father had more sense than to be wheedled into disgracing—"

"Allow me to interrupt you, Victor. You have a right to say what you like, of course, but not to me—if you choose to say harsh things of my mother. I don't want to quarrel with you, but—"

"I suppose a quarrel between us won't mend the matter?"

"No. If it would I might be as eager for it as you."

"You! A good deal you have got to complain of!"

"I'm not going to complain. I suppose the connection will be rather an advantage to me than otherwise. For aught I know, it may be the next thing to being son of a king, to be son of a king's wife. Still, if my advice had been asked, I should have opposed it, because I should have guessed that it would have been distasteful to you and Agatha."

"Distasteful, I should think! I would have moved heaven and earth to prevent it."

"A pretty strong mechanical force would be required to start the earth even, though, if you had really set yourself about it, I have no doubt you might have gone so far beyond Archimedes as to accomplish your undertaking. As for moving heaven, forgive me if I believe that to have been beyond your power even."

"I can bear sarcasm pretty well, but by Jove, Aaron, I never felt quite so much like punching anybody's head, as I do yours at this minute."

"The article is quite at your service. Will you make the trial now?"

"No, upon second thoughts I don't think I will. I believe I will bid you good-evening instead."

"Just as you please," was the cool retort. And Victor, turning upon his heel, returned

to his own apartment, where he found Wirt Leonardson, who, seeing his friend's rueful face, rushed up to him with an air of the greatest concern and began to feel his pulse.

"Bad—bad," pronounced the self-constituted empiric, with an ominous shake of the head. "This is a case for phlebotomy."

"I'll phlebotomize you!" retorted Vic, irascibly.

"Worse and worse Strong indications of internal cantankerosity, requiring an immediate application of Croton oil and ipecacuanha, infused in an oyster stew, to be superseded by a nicotine fumigation."

"Get out with your infernal gibberish. I tell you I am in no mood for trifling."

"Who in the dickens said you were? Can't a fellow take your diagonal diagnosis without being accused of the heterogeneous offence of trifling? Trifling! Let me remind you, Sir Diogenes, that that is what the homogeneous wretches do, who amuse themselves with crushing eggshells. No, not eggshells, but women's hearts. It is said, likewise, on good authority—Josephus or Joe Miller, I don't remember which—that women sometimes try the same thing on men's hearts. Tell me, my friend, I adjure you, by the sacred heads of all the bivalves you swallowed last night; I implore you, with my visual organs drenched in pickle—no, brine—from the lachrymose secretions—has any woman been trying it on you?"

"You go to the d—l!"

"That is what Justin Hartwell told me just before I came here."

"An old joke. Has the well of your invention gone dry, or did you break the pump-handle just now?"

"It's only a case of economy. But seriously, Vic. Your face is a whole book of lamentations. Are you out of funds again?"

"No."

"Your father hasn't failed?"

"No."

"Is—it anything about Agatha?"

"It concerns her."

"It. The word has a familiar sound, but I don't seem to catch the sense of it. What does 'it' mean?"

"It means marriage in this case."

"Marriage! Whose? Not Agatha's?"

"No. I should hope not. Mrs. Colbraith's—or Mrs. Wilbraham, I suppose she is now."

"You don't mean that, Vic!"

"I wish I didn't, but I do mean just that."

"My God! This is too bad. If I had

known—if I had dreamed—I ought to have told."

"What did you know about it?"

"About this marriage? That is just what I did not know about."

"You are almost as explicit as Sairey Gamp, on the subject of Mrs. Harris. What, in the name of common sense, was it you ought to have told?"

"Well—nothing. Mrs. Colbraith hasn't had a very good name in some quarters, but I suppose Mr. Wilbraham must have known that."

"O, that was all a calumny! Wash Peters started the stories, I believe. I liked Mrs. Colbraith well enough as a housekeeper, but I didn't hanker after her for a stepmother."

"How will Agatha like it?"

"Not very well."

"Is she coming home this vacation?"

"No. The bridal pair"—with a wry face—"are on their travels. Aggie is going to spend her vacation with Aunt Mallory in Cambridge. I am given my choice of going home or staying here, but I don't think I shall do either. Aaron will go, I suppose, but I've got an invitation to spend the vacation with Hartwell, and I think I shall accept it."

"I wonder how Aaron feels about it?"

"He feel! I'd as soon see the north pole in tears for the navigators lost in its vicinity. Aaron Colbraith was made with muscles and a brain, but—well, I don't know. He has contrived to put us all—father, Aggie and me—under obligations to him; but sometimes I can't help wondering whether everything of this sort is not done with an eye to the future."

"I can't quite make the fellow out. He appears well, and father thinks he is going to make a minister; but I'd about half as soon accept the Rev. Nicholas Satan's ministrations in holy things as the Rev. Aaron Colbraith's."

"I don't think that either gentleman will take orders in a hurry. There isn't anything very bad about Ron, I guess, only he's so confounded prudent. Where's Hartwell? Let's get the boys together and see what we can dish up for fun. I feel like working off my melancholy in a good rousing spree."

"To the tune of 'Away with melancholy' and 'Don't you cry when things get squally.' I never thought I was cut out for a poet, but the chances are that I should make over into one admirably."

Victor had changed his slippers for gaiters, meanwhile, and his dressing-gown for a stylish summer sack. He was not a very melancholy looking object, certainly, as he put his arm within his friend's, and the pair went out together in search of fun. It is the advantage of a temperament like his that no depression affects its elasticity. So the spirits of such a person, like truth, when "crushed to earth, will rise again."

At his next meeting with Aaron, which was not for two or three days, Victor apologized for whatever had been offensive in his language at their last interview, and was assured that nothing had been laid up against him.

Their cordiality was not enhanced by the new relations, nor, on the other hand, was there any appearance of antagonism between them. Aaron's allowance was increased to the same amount as Vic's after the marriage, but the former still lived frugally, and lent freely of his surplus funds to Vic, when there was need, which happened pretty often in the course of their college career.

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER THREE YEARS.

ALL things have an end, schooldays not excepted. Perhaps Mrs. Wilbraham would have been willing to prolong Agatha's indefinitely, but, since that was impossible, she welcomed her stepdaughter at her coming home with demonstrative warmth.

Agatha had grown a tall stately girl. Her early promise of beauty had fulfilled itself wonderfully. She was a blending of the lily and the rose—the lily for stateliness, the rose for sweetness, and both for beauty and grace. In manners, though often thoughtful and serious, she was not wanting in vivacity. There was nothing of the giggling maiden about her, laughing senselessly at everything, nor, on the other hand, did she affect to be superior to the enjoyment of rational mirth. Time, aided by want of contact, had softened her old impressions of Mrs. Wilbraham, so that on coming home Agatha had been able to greet that lady with seeming cordiality. But every day of renewed intercourse brought a renewal of the old feelings. Mrs. Wilbraham was studiously kind. The girl had nothing to complain of; yet try as she would, she could not help distrusting, and at times almost loathing her stepmother. While meeting constantly and exchanging the inter-

course necessary between members of the same family without collision, both were aware of an impassable gulf between them.

Agatha's return only preceded by a week or two that of the college boys, now with the dignity of bachelor of arts to support. Aaron had graduated with the highest honors, as was to be expected, though Wirt Leonardson had made a grand rally at the last, and almost equalled the other. Victor came off with distinction, indeed, but it was as being the greatest scapegrace of his class. At one time, truth to tell, he had narrowly escaped expulsion, being saved therefrom only by his father's influence.

Mr. Wilbraham was seriously disappointed in his son. He could have forgiven a little wildness, if Victor, like Wirt Leonardson, had given proof of intellectual capacity. It is probable that Aaron Colbraith's praiseworthy course had made Victor's, by contrast, seem the more disreputable to his father. This effect was undoubtedly aided by Mrs. Wilbraham's artful excuses for Victor's naughtiness, which were always so contrived as to make his son's career particularly distasteful to her husband. So when the young men came home, Aaron got the warmer welcome of the two from all but Agatha.

Agatha did not dislike Aaron. She retained a grateful recollection of his past services. His intellectual successes made her respect him. He was gentlemanly and companionable; talked well, when disposed, and, though never giving nor inviting confidence, seemed friendly and in all respects estimable. If she could have entirely dissociated him and his mother in her mind, Agatha thought it probable that she would have regarded the young man as a sort of demi-god; and whenever she felt coldly towards him, she accused herself of being actuated by an unjust prejudice, which she ought to rise above, and which she was generally successful in doing.

The coming home of the young people brought about a season of gayety, in which Wirt Leonardson and Grace frequently participated. This, notwithstanding the fact that Mrs. Wilbraham had set her face against these young people, never missing an opportunity to hurl a dart at the one or the other.

"That Wirt Leonardson had better join a circus company. He would make an excellent clown, and it's all he ever will be good for," she observed to her husband, one day,

in Agatha's hearing. The latter, fixed in her determination to avoid collision, made no remark, though she felt an aching desire that her father might undertake Wirt's defence. He did nothing of the sort, however, but rather coincided with his wife.

Wirt was aware of my lady's hostility, yet he did not choose on that account to discontinue his visits. Grace, too, was often invited by Agatha, so that the young people of the two families were much together.

It chanced, therefore, that on a September day, when the asters were in bloom, and the tuberoses exhaling perfume from their waxen cups, and the maples had adorned themselves in scarlet and russet, and the grapes on southern walls were ripening, Wirt, with a new song which he wished Agatha to learn, walked out from the village in the direction of the State House. It was early, and he was in no hurry. Meeting a loaded wain, he stopped for a moment's talk with the driver, who avowed proudly that "this was his last jag of grain, and lucky, too, for his barns were crammed chock full of one sort and another."

Wirt congratulated the farmer with sunny good-nature, adding a jest which was responded to by a vociferous laugh, as the two separated and went their several ways; the farmer smiling broadly, and Wirt quietly, while walking on. The latter felt that the momentary contact had done him good; he could not tell how, exactly, but as matter attracts matter, so does mind influence mind genially or otherwise. On reaching the brow of a hill he stopped to look back at the farmer, whose noisy "Haw Buck!" he could still hear. A foot passenger was coming up the hill, walking rapidly with a swinging, half-insolent tread. He was a bronze-faced, grizzly-bearded man, with teeth and lips discolored by tobacco, and a scar, which his beard did not quite cover, across one side of his face. Coming up with Wirt, the man remarked:

"That's a nobby looking place up yonder," pointing to the Wilbraham estate, which occupied a commanding position half way up a gradual slope ending finally in the hill where the quarries were worked.

"Yes," assented Wirt.

"Who's governor up there?"

"What?"

"I mean who's the owner of the estate?"

"Mr. Wilbraham."

"O, his name is Wilbraham, is it? I

declare, I wouldn't mind taking stock in that concern myself. I suppose he wouldn't want to sell the property, would he?"

"I presume not."

"I believe I shall have to make him an offer though. What sort of a man is he to deal with? One of the cheat-you-out-of-your-eye-teeth order? eh?"

"Mr. Wilbraham is a shrewd man of business, but strictly honest, I believe."

"That's salubrious. Very. Glad to hear he's honest. I heard of a fellow once, a Dio somebody, I've forgotten his last name—"

"Not Lewis?" suggested Wirt.

"No, it wasn't Lewis. The chap, whoever he was, went poking about with a lantern through the streets of Boston, trying to find an honest man. They do say there wasn't one in the whole lot to bless his eyes with."

"Bad for Boston," laughed Wirt.

"That's so. But this Mr. Wilbraham—he's honest you say. Got much of a family?"

"Two children only."

"No wife?"

"O yes; and his wife has one son, Aaron Colbralth."

"Most likely she was a widow when he married her. Was that long ago?"

"About three years."

"Well, it's a pretty place. Gad, I think I must try to strike up a bargain with this Mr.—what did you say his name is?"

"Wilbraham."

"Wilbraham. Much obliged."

The stranger took out a cigar, lighted a match by drawing it briskly across his coat-sleeve, nodded to Wirt, and passed on. He had in no respect the appearance of a man who might become the purchaser of so valuable a place as Mr. Wilbraham's. He was cheaply, almost shabbily dressed. Then the cigar he had lighted was a villanously bad one, judging from its odor. These facts were no real proof of poverty, it is true. With some men they would not even have been presumptively so. But something about this person had given Wirt the impression that if he had been really the man of wealth he pretended to be, the outward presentment would have been different.

Wirt, we have said, was in no hurry. He met Dr. Layard, and stopped to talk with him. He had some thought of entering that physician's office fully half an hour after he had seen his new acquaintance turn into the winding way leading to the State House, before he himself entered the same shady

path. The shade ended a little before the house was reached, and here a sudden gust of wind removed Wirt's hat and whisked it off to a distant part of the grounds, he following, with a great delight in the chase. It was in the vicinity of a densely-sheltered summer-house that his recreant head-gear was recovered, and while brushing the dust from it, he heard a voice, unmistakably Mrs. Wilbraham's, saying in an intense, though not a loud tone:

"I tell you, Dan, I haven't got the money. I never have large sums at my command."

"You'll have to get it, though," said another voice, which Wirt also recognized, it being that of the stranger he had talked with on the road that afternoon.

"Humph!" thought Wirt, hurrying away. "This is as good as a smoked glass for looking at an eclipse. My roadside acquaintance wanted an excuse for getting into the house, did he? That's the secret of his wonderful interest in the property."

Wirt approached the house by the nearest path, and being admitted, found Agatha with Grace, who was spending the day with her friend, at the piano practising a duet. They both rose at his entrance, and Agatha gave him her hand with a frank pleased smile.

"Don't let me interrupt your playing," said Wirt.

"You do not," replied Agatha. "If we began with any Orphean inspiration it was quite spent before you came in."

"Then you wouldn't undertake winning a soul from Pluto with divinest strains?"

"Unless the impetus come with the occasion I should not care to make the effort."

"If you have an affair of that sort that you want attended to, we will do our best, though," laughed Grace. "Has Pluto carried off your Eurydice?"

"I should like to catch him at it!" declared the young man, in a blustering, robustious manner.

"Did you go to college to learn to talk big?" questioned Grace, railing. "You might have learned that at home by studying the part of Jack Falstaff."

"Do you know what becomes of mockers? There were some of that class once, who cried, 'Go up, Bald-head!' and the bears came out of the woods and ate them up, even to the brass sheaths on the end of their shoe-strings."

"I believe the shoe-strings is an interpolation," said Agatha. "I always thought that

was an invention of a later time. If Wirt is an adept at talking big, he ought to have been here a little while ago, oughtn't he, Grace?"

"Why?" asked the young man, curiously.

"There has been a man here who wanted to buy the place. He got quite angry because papa refused to sell it."

"Yes," chimed in Grace; "his violence quite frightened me, and so it did Mrs. Wilbraham, I know, for she grew as white as a piece of marble. The men were in the library, with the door open, so that we could hear nearly all that was said. Mr. Wilbraham got vexed at last and ordered the man out of the house."

"Smoked glass again," thought Wirt, who however was hindered from replying by the entrance of Aaron Colbraith. His coming called a quick blush into Grace's face, which she turned to a window to conceal.

"Let's have a game of croquet," proposed Agatha.

All agreeing, they went out to the ground. This was at some distance, the land immediately about the house being too sloping and uneven for croquet. Grace and Aaron led the way. Agatha was detained a moment by one of the servants, and Wirt waited to accompany her.

The years since we met her last had added nothing but loveliness and sweetness to Grace Leonardson. There was, it may be, some suggestion of infantile prettiness in her face. Yet she was by no means a characterless person. Trustful, impulsive, affectionate, pitiful for all manner of woes, and anxious to take upon herself the whole burden of their uprootal, the inheritress of stern creeds with which her indulgent heart was forever at war. Such was the young lady now walking at Aaron Colbraith's side, and stopping anon to pluck some pansies from the bed where, blooming in velvety splendor, Grace declared that they were "making eyes at her."

"Little darlings! I love them. Don't you?" she said, holding up her flowers.

Aaron laid his hand upon the hand that held them, and seemed to examine the cluster attentively.

"I like violets better," he said, then. "They are so much like some one that I know."

"Agatha, I suppose," suggested Grace, with a crimsoning cheek.

"No, *she* is like these," returned Aaron.

"I can't say much for your taste if you like

violets better than you do pansies," returned Grace. "See what bright intelligent faces they have."

"I see a bright intelligent face—a beautiful face, too, and very sweet withal, but it does not belong to the pansies," affirmed the young man, looking intently at her. I think he must have been on the point of forgetting a declaration he had made once to the effect that he should have no time for love-making for the next fifteen years. Undoubtedly, Grace Leonardson was a sufficient excuse for such forgetfulness, however.

"It must be in fancy's eye that you see such a face," protested Grace, laughing faintly, and wishing that her cheeks would not grow so hot and red.

"In fancy's eye! I have sometimes thought so, too. I have wondered whether anything so sweet and perfect can have a real existence. But all my senses assure me that she is a veritable fact. I have seen her feed upon bread and meat, like the rest of us grosser mortals. I have listened to her voice in speech, and song, and heavenly laughter. The creature of the fancy is impalpable, but this being I can put out my hand and touch,' laying a finger against her glowing cheeks. "No. It is not in fancy's eye that I see her. She is here, and her name, sweet and lovely like herself—is Grace. Grace, the lovely and the beloved. Does she love, too?"

"She has just told you that she loves the pansies," rejoined Grace, striving hard for playful indifference of tone.

"She told me so. But her love is too precious to be wasted on inanimate objects. 'To whom much is given, from him much shall be required.' Is there not such a saying as that? It seems to have a familiar sound. Let the much that is given, be my love for you. The much that is required, your love for me. I am hasty in speaking to you thus, perhaps, but tell me, have I spoken in vain?"

"I fear you are jesting with me, or else—"

"Jesting? Could I jest upon such a subject? Now, what else?"

"Or else that you may have seen—I mean been led to think—that I care for you, and so have spoken out of pity."

"I should never talk to a woman of love for whom I felt only pity. I am not generous enough for that. Perhaps a generous man in my position would not have spoken to you at all. It will be years before I can marry. I have ambition; I must have wealth,

position, and it is all to be gained in a single hand-to-hand fight with the world—perhaps with the flesh and devil, too. You see, Grace, what I have set before me. It is going to be hard work and no play. Idleness, pleasure, self-pampering, will do for a soft-skinned gossoon like Victor Wilbraham, whose inheritance was made ready for him before he was born, but such things are not for me. So, Grace, I cannot ask you to name an early day for our marriage. Love in a cottage would not suit me. I should not like to see my pretty wildwood violet bending over the suds, or making her hands red and dingy with washing dishes. But I cannot deny myself the indulgence, the compensation, the ineffable happiness of hearing from her own lips that she loves me, and will wait for me. Will she say it, Grace?"

"She loves you. She will wait for you to the end of time, if need be," was the answer, in a low fervid tone.

Woman's love, and especially that of a woman like Grace Leonardson, is not apt at discerning motives in the eye of the object loved. Otherwise it might have occurred to Grace that Aaron Colbraith's was a self-seeking love, caring little for any one's happiness but his own. "Through a glass darkly." That is an essentially human mode of vision, and particularly favored by lovers, who, nevertheless, following the light of their own feelings, imagine themselves walking in light ineffable.

A little time was given to raptures and endearments, which the sheltering shrubbery permitted. Then Aaron said, somewhat hesitatingly:

"I don't know whether I have a right to ask it, but I should like our engagement to be kept secret for a little while. The truth is, I think my mother would oppose it, and she is—well—very determined. If you are willing—"

"I should like to tell my father, and Wirt, and Agatha—"

"And Tom, Dick and Harry, and that dear old soul, Mrs. Grundy. There, Gracie dear, I ought not to have said that. You know it was in jest. You shall tell whom you like, of course. Yet—it is all my foolish pride, I know—I should be glad to show that I am capable of making my way in the world before this is known."

"No one doubts that, I think. But it shall be as you wish. I will not speak of our engagement until you give me leave."

"Thank you, Grace. If you find the secret burdensome, I will absolve you from it at any time, you know."

"Are you ever coming, there?" called Wirt, impatiently, from the croquet ground, which he and Agatha, taking a nearer way, had reached some time before. "We were beginning to think that you ought to have taken a guide along with you."

"We have been botanizing a little. I believe you did not take botany when you were in college," returned Aaron, indifferently.

"Not I. The regular course was enough for me. What color will you take, red or white?"

"White. Agatha plays with you, I suppose. Miss Grace and I are going to beat you. Please to remember that I told you so."

"Boast not. There was once a bragging Philistine of the name of Goliath—"

"Don't, Wirt," interposed Grace, reprovingly, "I don't like to hear Bible characters quoted in jest."

"I thought Goliath might be common property for saint or sinner. The ministers are always whipping each other off with Bible wit, but if you insist upon it we'll leave the whole field for them. Your play, Grace. O, thank you for leaving your ball so conveniently for me. I'll try to turn it to very good account before I have done with it."

In truth, Grace was playing badly, though she usually excelled in this game. One or two shots made with an unsteady hand at the beginning, proved disastrous, and, afterwards, having lost confidence in herself, she failed to retrieve. Her opponents were quick to seize their advantage. Aaron tried in vain to conceal his annoyance. Failure even in trifling matters was intensely galling to him. Then he had indiscreetly boasted beforehand of victory in this game. To lose it, with his overstrained ideas of the ignominy of failure, would be mortifying in the extreme. When he got the play into his own hands he resolved to push things vigorously, but a splitting stroke in which he had never missed before, failed deplorably, and after that the game was easily won by his opponents. A muttered exclamation, which sounded very much as if it might have begun with a d and ended with a personal pronoun of two letters, escaped his lips when his shot missed.

"We are going to be beaten," said Grace, who felt uncomfortably conscious of Aaron's annoyance and of her own bad playing.

"It appears so."

"Well, somebody must win. It might as well be they as us, I suppose."

"Do you think so? I am not used to failure."

"I am sorry I played so badly," apologized Grace, who was almost ready to cry.

"So am—what did you say? That you played badly? Ah no. Luck was against us this time. Fortunes of war, you know."

Grace, looking across the ground, now saw Mrs. Wilbraham approaching them.

"What a handsome woman your mother is," said the girl. "I think she must have been a wonderful beauty when she was younger. How much your father must have admired her."

Aaron swung his mallet with sudden force, striking a ball which he sent spinning off the ground.

"I beg your pardon. What were you saying?" he said, hastily.

Mrs. Wilbraham's approach relieved Grace from the necessity of repeating her remark.

"Are you busy, Ronny?" inquired that matron, nodding slightly to Grace and Wirt.

"Not very," replied Aaron.

"Then will you please to come with me? Agatha, my dear, the wind is blowing up raw and cool. Do you think it prudent for you to be out? You know you have had a cold for a day or two."

"Do you feel chilly? Why did you not bring a shawl?" inquired Wirt, with sudden concern. "Do let me run and get you—a rabbit skin—or something of that sort—to wrap you up in."

"Pray don't rush into danger for my sake," laughed Agatha. "Was killing a hare among the twelve labors of Hercules?"

"Ask Aaron. He knows what all learning and all science knows."

"It may have been, though if it was, historians have made a slight mistake, probably that of substituting for it the Lernean Hydra" replied Aaron, walking away with Mrs. Wilbraham when he had spoken.

The others returned to the house soon afterwards to learn the song Wirt had brought. When that was done, he and Grace made their parting bows, and went home, both with matter for reflection in their minds. Wirt concerning the man he had heard called Dan that afternoon; Grace touching the new relations between herself and Aaron Colbraith, for which blessing, descending upon her young life, she felt that she could never thank God enough.

"With what Measure ye Mete."

BY HESTER EARLE.

PART FOURTH.

CHAPTER IX.

MOTHER AND SON.

MRS. WILBRAHAM and Aaron, on leaving the croquet-ground, kept silence until out of hearing of those from whom they had just parted. Then the woman inquired, rather sharply:

"What have you been saying to Grace Leonardson this afternoon?"

Aaron changed color and looked annoyed.

"If you expect a faithful account of all I say, you had better keep a reporter on my track," he replied, after a moment's hesitation.

"Bah! There is no use in your taking that tone with me. As it happens, though, the reporter's services would have been quite superfluous to-day. I was on your track myself, and heard so much that I could easily guess the rest. But it won't do, Ron. There is too much depending. This girl has nothing. You can't afford to give up so much for a baby face. All your talk about making your own way in the world will do for show. It is very fine in theory, but when you come to put it in practice you stand a fair chance of making of yourself, as Byron says

—'one the more

To baffled millions who have gone before.'

A short cut to fortune is always best. You will marry Agatha. I hate the girl, but that don't hinder her being a good match for you."

"How do you know that she will marry me?"

"She will do what her father tells her, and I can manage him in this affair."

Aaron pulled a head of grass and broke the stem into inch pieces, walking on in silence meanwhile.

"There's another thing, Aaron. I've got to have some money—more than you or I either have got—between now and to-morrow morning. I think I can get it for this time, but the demand is liable to be repeated. I can't ask for it without creating suspicion, and that must be avoided at all hazards.

What I want is, that you should put yourself in a position to help me out when these demands come. If you marry Agatha, you will be made a partner in the works, of course, and will have command of what sums you please. The chances are, that in the end the whole thing will come into your hands. Vic is fast wearing out his father's patience. I shouldn't be surprised at a rupture between them any day. You are not a fool, and can, of course, see where your interests lie. I'd as soon it should be the Leonardson girl as the other, if the question was only between them. I don't love either of them any too well. But I like money, and so do you. He's a bad mariner that don't trim his sails to suit the weather. Well, are you convinced?"

Aaron plucked another head of grass, broke it, and flung the parts impatiently away.

"This demand for money," he said, then, "can it not be resisted?"

"Would you advise me to take the consequences?"

"Who is it?"

"Secker."

"I wish the man was in—"

"So do I—that is, if the place you were about to mention is a sufficiently remote and uncomfortable one. You will have to see him. I dare not risk another meeting. I believe Wirt Leonardson came near stumbling upon us this afternoon."

"You should avoid such risks."

"I intend to be cautious. I suppose you know that Vic is coming home to-night?"

"No."

"Yes. He will come home in debt, of course. He always does. If I have any influence in a certain quarter, there'll be an end of some things soon. Then you can make all sure. You'll be in the way of being the richest man in the country. That's a little different from— Well, what do you say?"

"I wonder if there really is a devil?"

The woman laughed a scornful laugh.

"I don't see how that concerns us," she observed.

"I dare say not. I will think of what you have said. Is there anything else?"

"Nothing else now, I believe."

"Then I will leave you to walk back alone."

"Come up to my room after supper. I shall want to see you then. And don't be gone too long. It will be no more than brotherly for you to be at home to welcome Vic when he comes. Besides, it has a good effect to keep the contrast between you and the prodigal before his father's eyes."

To this Aaron made no reply, but started off in a direction contrary to that his mother was pursuing. His blood was boiling. He felt as if he were possessed of more devils than the number cast out of one of old. Yet the spirit of resistance to evil was not dead within him. He knew the right, and admired it, too. Knowing this, he might still the wrong pursue, but, if he did, it would not be altogether willingly.

CHAPTER X.

FATHER AND SON.

VICTOR, who had been away for a week, came that night, as was expected. Something of the young man's easy buoyancy was gone, they all felt, though he laughed as frequently and louder than was his wont.

After supper Mr. Wilbraham withdrew to the library to read the daily papers—his invariable custom—and Victor soon followed him thither. The former laid down his newspaper, took off his glasses, which he held in his hand, and looked at his son. The latter sidged with his watch chain, and seemed to be suffering from embarrassment. Something he felt compelled to answer to his father's questioning eyes, however, and he finally blurted out:

"Have you got a few hundreds by you that you can let me have?"

"For what purpose?"

"To pay a debt or two."

"I supposed so. There seems to be no hope of your wanting money to embark in any kind of business. You are a graceless spendthrift. You had two hundred dollars when you went to Boston a week ago. But of course that was not enough to last you home."

"It would have been, but I went to see a race at the Riverside Park—"

"And betted?"

"Yes."

"I told you some time ago," Mr. Wilbraham declared, with stern severity, "that if you ever contracted any gaming or betting debts, you would have to pay them without my help. You know my opinion of such courses. It is enough for me to support you in idleness and extravagance. Your vices, if you contract them, you must pay for yourself."

"But, father," rejoined Victor, reddening and paling by turns, "this debt is already made, and I have no way of paying it."

"What is the amount?"

"Eight hundred dollars."

"That very sum"—going to his desk and taking out a package of bills—"I received to-day for the sale of a piece of land bought three years ago with half the money. During those three years I have carefully improved the property, expending more money, besides the thinking and planning necessary to that end. Shall I now throw the whole amount received by its sale into the gutter? or, what is still worse, give it to encourage you in a career of vice and folly, breaking my solemn word, too, in doing so? You ought to know me better than to expect it, Victor." He replaced the package, locked the desk, and returned to his seat, his face hard and immovable.

"Then you will not help me out of this scrape?"

"I am sorry that you have got into the scrape, but the responsibility is your own. There is no need of multiplying words upon the subject."

Victor got up, hesitated a moment, as if debating with himself whether it was best to try another appeal, sighed deeply, and with unsteady steps walked from the room. In the hall, which from some cause was not lighted, he ran against Mrs. Wilbraham.

"Why, Vic! how you frightened me," said the latter. "I wonder what blew the light out? It must have been the wind, though, I suppose."

"I suppose so. Do you know where Aaron is?"

"In his room, I think."

Victor went up stairs; Aaron's room was on the opposite side of the hall from his own. He knocked at the door, and was immediately admitted.

"In trouble, Vic? How pale you are! Is it another money difficulty?" said Aaron, with an air of concern.

"Of course," answered the other, brusquely. "Aren't you going in a little deep? Can I do anything to help you?"

"No. It's beyond your depth this time—the main difficulty, that is—but if you can let me have fifty dollars, I'll be much obliged to you. I'm going away from home in the morning."

"Where are you going?"

"To the dogs, probably. Father may see the time that he'll be sorry for this night's work."

"I wouldn't do anything rash," advised Aaron, placing the sum Vic had asked for in his hand.

"Rash? I don't suppose I shall do anything worse than breaking into a bank or forging a note, or some trifle of that sort," returned Victor, with a reckless laugh. "Much obliged to you, Aaron. 'A friend in need is a friend indeed,' they say. Good-by, if I don't see you again. I shall probably be stirring pretty early in the morning; and please don't mention that I'm going."

Aaron promised silence, and Vic crossed the hall to his own room. Agatha, who had been waiting uneasily for a chance to speak to her brother, soon followed him thither. She found him moody and indisposed to talk. He would tell her nothing about his difficulties, which, however, she feared were very serious.

"I didn't come to scold you, Vic," she said, on leaving him; "but I almost think it would have been the making of you if you had been a poor man's son. I am sure you have the power to do something, if you were spurred to it by necessity. I have always believed in you, and I always shall. So," half in jest and half in earnest, "I hope you will have a little care of my idol, that I don't find it clay."

To her great surprise Victor flung his head down upon his hands and burst into tears.

"Perhaps you have done me good," returned Vic, composing himself with an effort. "I will, at least, remember that there is one who believes in me. I am tired now, and am going to bed early. Good-night, Aggie."

She returned his "good-night," accompanying it with a kiss, and then went down, hoping to find her father still in the library. She heard him in the back-parlor, however, talking with Mrs. Wilbraham, and did not care to interrupt their *tete-a-tete*. Throwing open the hall-door, she looked out into the

night. The little pond below the house looked like a beaming eye in the full moonlight. The wind had gone down, and the air had a hint of frost.

"I must take care of my tuberose, or I shall lose them," thought Agatha, shivering a little as she felt the prick of the sharp air.

She remembered having seen a couple of deep baskets in an outhouse that day, and thought they would serve as covering for her plants. She brought them, accordingly, and carried them into the garden. The tuberose were in a border at the end of a long walk.

"There, you beauties," said Agatha, turning the baskets over them; "now please say 'Thank you,' for the shelter I have provided. Not very elegant, I admit, but it won't do to be fastidious in a case of life and death."

Having performed her task, she felt in no hurry to go back, but stood leaning against the paling, looking around her with the indifferent glance one bestows upon a landscape every feature of which is familiar. Suddenly she sniffed the air, detecting in it the odor of a cheap cigar. This surprised her a little, as the garden was not near the public street, and no one seemed to be in the grounds but herself. But the next minute she discovered, or thought she did, at least, the figures of two men standing quite stiff and still in some shrubbery at a little distance. Her first impulse was of fear, and she began retracing her steps at a quick run. Then she chided herself for cowardice, stopped, and examined the suspected spot attentively. The two figures were no longer visible. Trembling a little, she left the path, and walked vigorously towards the clump of shrubbery. Just then a man started out of its shadow, giving her a violent fright, but she immediately recognized Aaron Colbraith. The odor of the bad cigar was still plainly perceptible.

"I didn't know that you smoke, Aaron," said Agatha.

"I'm not much in the habit of it, but I had a cigar given me to-day, and I thought I would try it," replied the young man. "I hope I didn't frighten you."

"A little. I thought I saw two men in the shrubbery a few moments ago. Was it a case of double vision, or only the transfiguring effect of moonlight?"

"The latter, probably. Moonlight is very illusive. I wonder if that is why it is so highly in favor with lovers?"

"I dare say," said Agatha, lightly.

"Where is your shawl? You are not out here without it?"

"Yes."

"What a careless girl you are. I feel well disposed to scold you. You must go into the house directly."

"Are you coming too? I think I could beat you at a game of chess."

"I should like to accept your challenge, but the truth is, I do not feel quite well. I believe another whiff or two of that odious cigar would have made me sick."

"It is something new for you to be in danger of reaping the penalty of folly. You are always so circumspect. If it were not for suggesting an unpleasant comparison between myself and a certain class of persons said to be always glad of mischief, I could be almost pleased to see you suffer a little from the effects of your indulgence."

"Don't laugh at me, I beg of you."

"Then I will wish that your next cigar may agree with you better."

She flitted away as she spoke, a half smile upon her face, and he ground his heel down into the hard gravel upon which he stood, muttering between set teeth, "I wonder if all villains feel as I do when they have an ugly job on hand? It is a pity I had not been made a little better or a little worse."

"It is in your power to make yourself better or worse," was the parallel thought that ranged itself along beside the other.

CHAPTER XI.

MISCHIEF.

ON reaching the house, Agatha learned that her father had retired. So, resolving to find some chance of speaking to him in the morning about Victor's affairs, she went to her room, where, having taken down and loosely braided her hair, she brushed her teeth, treated herself to her nightly bath and went to bed.

Sometime in the night she awoke out of an unpleasant dream, to find herself shaking with an awful terror, which the dream had left upon her. This impression she could not throw off easily. So, remembering Franklin's prescription of air bathing for wakefulness, she got up and went to a window. Here, from the reflection upon objects outside, she could see that the library was lighted, which she thought rather strange at that hour. The illumination soon disap-

peared, however, and she heard cautious steps coming up the stairs and going on to Victor's room; heard the click of his latch in opening and shutting the door; then the silence belonging to night resumed its sway. Agatha felt considerably disturbed at what she had seen and heard, but forgetting it at length, went to sleep, and slept soundly until morning.

Mr. Wilbraham, meanwhile, had felt ill at ease since the last night's interview with his son. In a conversation with his wife before retiring, his anger against that young spend-thrift had risen to a high pitch, but his dreams were haunted by Victor's despairing face, and the morning found him inclined to greater leniency. He was naturally a positive, but not a harsh man. Perhaps he remembered, too, that even he had not been strong against temptation.

"For once I will pay his betting debts, but it shall be the last time," the father resolved, in silent compromise with himself. Directly he went to his desk in the library, where the money received from the previous day's sale of property had been deposited. The money was gone. He turned over the contents of the desk hastily, thinking that he must have overlooked the parcel, but no. It certainly was not there. At this moment Agatha came in.

"I am glad to find you here, papa," she said. "Do you know where Victor is? I cannot find him anywhere, and I am greatly worried about him. I know he was in trouble when he came home, and last night he must have been very restless, for I heard him down here in the dead of night; and now he is not to be found. What does it all mean, papa?"

"I hope in God's name that it does not mean what I fear it does!" said Mr. Wilbraham, who had grown strikingly pale.

"Is it anything about Victor? He must have left home in the night, I think," said Mrs. Wilbraham, standing in the door. "His valise is gone and some of his clothes. I suppose you knew that he was going, did you not? He told Aaron, though, I believe, that you would repent of last night's work, and maybe he has stolen away without your knowledge, to punish you."

"It is true, then," groaned Mr. Wilbraham. "It is my son who is the thief. No, he is not my son! I disown him from this hour."

"Victor a thief! I could never have

believed it; though I knew, to be sure—
What is it he has taken?"

"The eight hundred dollars I put in this desk yesterday."

"But he did not know of its being there."

"Yes. He saw it here last night. There is no room for doubt, unfortunately."

"I cannot believe it, papa," said Agatha.

"Why not? The step from recklessness to crime is easy enough. Now let us hear no more about it, nor him."

"But I loved him so, papa."

Yes, that was it. Victor a thief, when she loved him so? It was quite impossible. A very womanly style of argument, but it seemed conclusive to her. Like another tender and faithful sister—O, shame on the woman who could seek to throw the smirch of infamy over such an affection!—

"Her soft heart refused to discover
The faults that so many could find."

There was mystery and darkness, it is true. The coincidences were striking. But Victor never took the money. That opinion "fire could not melt out of her." Where, then, was Victor? Surely he would write to her. With palpitating eagerness, as the days went on, she watched for news of him. Every letter that came for her cost her a fit of trembling, ending in disappointment when she failed to discover his writing upon the outside. The hope deferred which maketh the heart sick began to be her daily portion.

Aaron encouraged her in the belief that Victor was innocent, though less from conviction, she feared, than out of consideration for her. Aaron was now agent at the slate works. It was a disappointment to Mr. Leonardson, doubtless, but the young man had decided not to become a minister. The new agent discovered uncommon executive ability, and the business prospered in his hands. Mr. Wilbraham was never weary of praising his new assistant.

"Aaron is a splendid fellow, Agatha. I could not get on at all without him. Young men in general are so worthless now-a-days that it is really refreshing to find one who is neither knave nor fool," he said, once.

"I trust we know several of that sort," returned Agatha.

"It would puzzle you to mention them, though, I suspect. How, for instance, will you head the list of your 'several?'"

"I do not think," said the girl, blushing slightly, "that Wirt Leonardson is either knave or fool."

"A compound of both would perhaps describe him most fitly."

"What reason have you for saying that, papa?"

"Any young man must be such, I think, who, while professing the greatest friendship for a young lady of his acquaintance, does not hesitate to couple her name with slanderous epithets."

"Has Wirt Leonardson done this?"

"He has."

"Who is the lady?"

"Agatha Wilbraham."

"I think you must be deceived. Wirt Leonardson would never have done that."

"I am not deceived. My informant was an ear-witness to his words."

"Who was your informant?"

"That I am not at liberty to tell. It was a friend of yours and of mine. He thought we ought to be on our guard against such a person, and I agreed with him entirely."

The same evening Wirt Leonardson came to call at Mr. Wilbraham's, and asked for Agatha. She was in her room, and did not come down, but sent him the following note instead:

"WIRT LEONARDSON,—Sir: Your conscience will tell you why I refuse to see you now, or ever again, except as we may meet unavoidably, and then it must be as strangers.
AGATHA."

This Wirt endorsed with:

"My conscience acquits me. An enemy hath done this. Tell me, at least, of what I am accused.
WIRT."

Agatha could not on the spur of the moment think of anything, at once laconic and crushing, to reply to this. Something she wrote and tore it up. Then tried again and was equally unsuccessful. Finally she determined to go down and tell him what it was that he was accused of, with a lingering half-hope that in spite of all he might be able to prove himself innocent. When she reached the head of the stairs she saw that he was in parley with Mrs. Wilbraham, and heard him say:

"I suppose that I need not have used the words I did. If it is as you say, I don't think I shall care to come here again. Good-night, madam."

Agatha had no doubt that Mrs. Wilbraham had taxed the young man with his slanderous epithets, and that it was his acknowledgment of the same which she had overheard. With a strange sinking of the

heart she crept back to her room. If Wirt was false, where could she look for truth? She heard a crunching of the gravel beneath her window, and, looking out, saw that Aaron Colbraith was walking there. Was it an answer to her question? After two or three turns up and down the path, the young man left the grounds, and soon, by the moonlight, which made the night "like daylight sick—a little paler," Agatha could see him going down the street at a rapid pace.

Wirt Leonardson, meanwhile, with no very pleasant subject for reflection, had returned to Dr. Layard's office, where he was now a student. He took down and opened a heavy volume, but at the end of two hours knew no more of its contents than at the beginning. That was not the book's fault, though you might have thought it was, by the way he shut it then, and banged it down upon the table. Leaving the office, he went straight home, and found the house deserted. It was the night for the evening prayer meeting, he remembered, and thought it probable that his father and Grace had gone thither. Mr. Leonardson soon came in alone, however.

"Did not Grace go with you?" asked Wirt.

"No. She said she had a headache. She has probably gone to bed. Hannah, I believe, is away for the night. I have letters to write, and am going to my study. So I will leave you to shut up the house and take care of the fires."

"I'll see that all is right," assented Wirt, who proceeded at once to "shut up the house," and then sat down by the remains of a fire in the sitting-room. Here he soon fell into deep thought, from which he was roused by the ringing of the doorbell.

"You, Grace?" said Wirt, on opening the door.

"What did you mean by locking me out?" asked the girl, entering with her face in a glow.

"Father thought you had gone to bed. He said you had a headache. Where have you been?"

"Out for a walk," replied Grace, with an air of reserve.

"Humpti, iddity, bow, wow, wow," growled Wirt, with pretended fierceness, as, making a sudden dash at her, he stood her up with her back against the wall. "Am I going to be put off with such an answer as that, do you think? Will you undertake to play at secrets with me? By the magic mirror of the great enchanter, Halllogabolis, you shall

make confession to me of your incomings and your outgoings before you give sleep to your eyes or slumber to your eyelids."

"Do let me be, Wirt," pleaded Grace, laughing and blushing while trying to escape from him.

"Do let you be Wirt? I am not ready to relinquish that character myself yet. Come. Your confession. I shall not let you off without it."

"Why should you think—"

"I tell you I am in consort with the great enchanter—what did I call his name?—Halllogabolis."

"Then, if there is anything you want to know, you had better apply to him," was the demure reply.

"O, but the magic mirror has met with an accident. Got smashed, in fact. There, Gracie, I won't pretend to be a magician's consort any longer, but your own brother Wirt Leonardson. Now sit down, please, and tell me all about it."

"All about what?"

"That pretended headache of yours."

"It wasn't pretended. I really did have a headache; and—if you want to know so much—I've been out walking with Aaron Colbraith."

Wirt's brow grew bent, and his face darkened on the instant. He gave the smouldering fire a sharp poke with the toe of his boot, and a swarm of angry sparks flew out at him like wasps when their nest is invaded.

"I suppose all that spitting, and spluttering, and flying out at you, is as much as to say, 'Let us alone,'" averred Grace, laughing nervously.

But Wirt was not to be diverted from the subject under consideration.

"I want you to tell me, Grace," he said, "whether you care particularly for Aaron Colbraith or not?"

Her crimsoning cheeks and downcast eyes were a sufficient answer.

"O Gracie, Gracie! And he is going to marry Agatha Wilbraham. His mother told me so to-night," said Wirt, with pity unutterable for the white anguished face that tried to hold itself unmoved for a moment, then fell forward upon his shoulder. But she rallied presently.

"I don't believe it," she protested. "It may be true, but I don't believe it."

"And what if it should be true?" asked Wirt, huskily.

"Well—it wont kill me, I suppose. I'm not romantic enough to die for love. I doubt if my hair would even turn white in a night. But, well, I suppose I should feel it a little at first. I don't believe a word of it, though. In the first place, I don't think Agatha likes him—or, at least, not in that way."

"I'm afraid you are mistaken. But that in the first place. What next?"

"O, you needn't expect me to put things into logical order, with a firstly, and secondly, and thirdly, like a sermon, according to rule, with a corollary, and all complete. It's almost eleven o'clock, and I'm more than half as sleepy as Dickens's fat boy; though, after all, I believe he was always asleep, as well as sleepy. Well, I intend to be asleep soon. Good-night, Wirt."

Despite her expressed intention, Grace showed no inclination to seek sleep when she had reached her room. Opening her writing-desk, she sat down to it, and after leaning her head upon her hand for a little while, began to write. Two or three notes were indited and torn up before the following was produced:

"AARON,—I have heard a strange thing to-night—strange, at least, considering the source from which it comes. Often, in the town gossip, I have heard the same before, and took no notice of it. It is that you are to marry Agatha. Your mother told Wirt so to-night. How far her assertion expressed your wish or intention, I can learn only from yourself. No one's words but your own can make me believe you capable of insincerity or double-dealing.

"Yet, if I were to let reason, instead of affection, sway me, I might recall things that need explanation—particularly the proposal with which you surprised me to-night—that for a private marriage. Did I, or did I not, assure you that, under no circumstances, could I ever consent to such a plan. I can never be sure of saying to you, or of having said, what I wish, on any point upon which we differ. So, if I failed to make my negative understood as such, I desire to be explicit now. I shall never place myself in a false position, even for love of you.

"And now I must remind you of a promise which you gave me once—to the effect, that is—that if I ever found the secret of our engagement burdensome, you would release me from keeping it. I told you then that I

should like it to be known to my father, Wirt and Agatha. I repeat the same now, and trust that you will have no objection to admitting these persons to our confidence—supposing, that is, that you still wish the engagement to remain a fact.

"You will perhaps complain that I have written coldly, but please to consider that the bulletin I have received to-night is, so to speak, semi-official. It cannot, therefore, be quite ignored, though it may not be believed; and protestations of affection, where there is a shadow of doubt as to the sentiment of the individual addressed, do not become a woman. I await your answer. GRACE."

To this a postscript was added in the morning:

"P. S. You must not think, Ron, that I feel half so high-and-mighty as the foregoing may seem to indicate. I trust you. G."

Aaron's consternation on reading this missive was unutterable. He loved Grace Leonardson, though he had determined to marry Agatha. His proposal of a private marriage had been made in the mad hope of practising some deception by which love and interest might both be gratified. Now he saw plainly that that hope must be abandoned. Grace's letter had shown him a new phase of her character. Though gentle and loving, she could be firm, too, for principle.

And now came a struggle by which the man was shaken heart and soul. On the one hand were love, and certain strivings yet of the purer and better nature within him. On the other, interest, and the security in their present position of his mother and himself. The latter proved the stronger forces. In the moment of their victory he replied thus to the note he had received from Grace:

"Can this thing which lies before me—so indifferent, so bitter, so unfeeling—be the work, the words of my Grace? Have I so mistaken her who seemed to me all that was sweet, and amiable, and tender, and loving? Then, indeed, it is time that our engagement cease to remain a fact. In writing to me as you did, you must have counted upon receiving in answer the assurance which—with the deepest pain to myself, but in the belief that I do what is best for the happiness of both—I now send you. You are free. Having thus, as I hope, satisfied you, nothing remains but for me to sign myself,

Very truly yours,

"AARON COLBRAITH."

"With what Measure ye Mete."

BY HESTER EARLE.

PART FIFTH.

CHAPTER XII.

DELILAH.

AS the winter came on, Mr. Wilbraham appeared to be breaking down somewhat. His son's misdemeanor had shaken him a good deal. When he had partially recovered from that shock, a new trouble arose—the latter on his wife's account. He had given her a dashing turnout, and it was really a fine sight to see her riding out. She managed her horses splendidly. Then she never looked so well as when driving. So it was but natural that she should frequently indulge in that pastime.

One day, early in winter, she did not return until a late hour. It was past eleven when her handsome barouche rolled briskly over the now frozen ground of the carriage-way.

"What made you so late? I was getting alarmed about you," said Mr. Wilbraham, meeting his wife at the door.

"Something about the carriage gave way. I had to stop and have it repaired."

"Where did you stop?"

"At the Lansing House. I have been to Bridgenorth. O, there are some parcels in the carriage. I hope Mike will attend to bringing them in."

Mr. Wilbraham volunteered to instruct Mike, and thought no more about the circumstance until the next day, when he had occasion to go to Sullivan, having business to transact with a gentleman of the name of Bosworth. After their negotiations were concluded, Mr. Bosworth spoke of having seen Mrs. Wilbraham in town the day before.

"A splendid whip your wife is," said the gentleman, "and those bays are well worth the driving. I don't believe there is a man in the county who could handle them better than Mrs. Wilbraham did in our streets yesterday."

"Yesterday?" returned Mr. Wilbraham. "You must be mistaken. My wife went to Bridgenorth yesterday."

"She had a deuce of a drive then, for I certainly saw her here as early in the day as ten o'clock, and again about four. There was some gentleman riding with her the last time I saw her."

Though convinced that the man must be in error, something restrained Mr. Wilbraham from pushing the subject further. He could not entirely forget it, however, and that night, while eating a late supper, remarked to his wife:

"Mr. Bosworth says he saw you in Sullivan yesterday."

Glancing up as he spoke, he saw that her face became suddenly mottled, like a piece of marbled paper. She got herself quickly under control, however, and replied with a firm voice:

"Mr. Bosworth was mistaken. It must have been the day before yesterday that he saw me."

That might easily have been. Mr. Wilbraham would have thought no more about it if it had not been for his wife's sudden change of countenance on hearing his remark. He thought of asking what gentleman was riding with her, but could not bring himself to put the question. It would make him appear suspicious, he thought, and he was not yet ready to avow himself so. He took an opportunity, however, to examine her barouche, and could not see where it had been repaired. Mrs. Wilbraham happened to come out to the carriage-house while he was thus occupied.

"Where did you say the carriage was broken the day you went to Bridgenorth?" he asked.

"One of the springs gave way," was the reply, after a moment's hesitation.

Mr. Wilbraham looked at the springs very closely.

"It was very well mended," he remarked.

In fact, he had seen no signs of its having been mended at all.

The whole affair left upon his mind the impression of something hidden, and it wor-

ried him a good deal. There was no reason that he knew of for connecting it with the rumors which had once been rife about Mrs. Colbraith. Yet in spite of himself he found that he was continually doing so, and groping darkly for a connecting link between the one and the other.

That link was soon supplied. Making a journey to Boston, not long afterwards, he went into a theatre on the evening following his arrival. Just in front of him, yet so much to the left as to give a fair side view of his face, sat a man who attracted Mr. Wilbraham's attention. The face, not at all prepossessing, was that of a middle-aged man. The beard was heavy and jetty, probably dyed. In figure the man was somewhat obese, and had a stout thick neck. Judging from the play of his features, as the representation progressed, Mr. Wilbraham guessed him to be in sympathy with villany rather than virtue. By-and-by, in one of the pauses between the acts, he was joined by a comrade, apparently, whom Mr. Wilbraham remembered to have seen before. We know the new-comer as Dan Secker, though Mr. Wilbraham did not.

Secker gave his companion a jovial punch of the shoulder.

"I'd as soon have thought to see Mrs. Parthington's son Ike in the very body, as you here, Priestley," he said. "When did you get back from Sullivan?"

"Last night."

"Anything the matter up in those regions?"

"Nothing serious. The old Rip Van Winkle—showed signs of getting one corner of his eye open. We concluded that a little more sleep, a little more slumber, might be good for his complaint. I've a tender spot in my heart, you see, Dan, and would sooner suffer almost any personal inconvenience than curtail Rip Van's peaceful slumbers."

"I'll bet you would. Colly gave you the wink, I suppose. She has feathered her nest pretty well, hasn't she?"

"It appears so. Slate seems to be a paying business. She always was fond of it, I remember. Used to buy slate-pencils by the dozen and eat them. It's quite a coincidence, isn't it?"

Mr. Wilbraham leaned forward, and, in a voice that had the crack of a lighted torpedo, demanded:

"Who is this Colly you are speaking of?"

"Gad, Priestley! it's Wilbraham," volunteered Secker, with a disagreeable half-smicker.

"Wilbraham? I don't think I ever heard that name before," drawled Priestley, in a well-controlled voice.

"No—come to think of it, I don't suppose you ever did. You didn't extend your travels to Eastberg, I believe."

"Not I. Greater attractions elsewhere. If this man—Wilbraham, did you call his name?—can prove that he has any right to pry into my affairs, maybe I'll answer his question then."

Mr. Wilbraham reflected. After all, they might not have meant his wife. In that case he would find himself very disagreeably placed by proclaiming his suspicions. To hope for any explanation from these men was quite useless in any event.

"I may have been mistaken," he said, presently. "If I was, pray consider that I ask your pardon."

"All right. 'The best of folks make mistakes sometimes. My wife does,' as some deuced fellow or other said. Dan, haven't we had about enough of this? Seems to me this play is dayvilish slow."

"Slow as a forty snail-power. I've had enough of it, if you have."

Without waiting for further parley the two worthies left the place. Mr. Wilbraham felt strongly tempted to follow and wring the truth out of them by main force, but he had sense enough left to warn him that that would not be an easy thing to do. Though silenced, that gentleman was far from being convinced. He had got what is popularly known as a flea in his ear. A very active tormenting flea it was, too. The more he thought upon what he had heard the more galling it became. Taken in connection with the circumstances which had previously appeared to him suspicious, it was almost overwhelming.

He had intended to remain two or three days longer in Boston, but he found himself utterly incapacitated for business. The next morning, therefore, he took the first train for Eastberg, and reached home toward evening of the same day. His wife was out driving, but Agatha greeted him affectionately, although his worn and weary look brought an anxious expression to her face.

"You are not sick, papa?" she said.

"No, a little tired, that is all."

"Then," with a glad ring in her voice, "I have news that I think will rest you. I have had a letter from Victor. No, papa," in reply to a warning gesture, "I have not forgot-

ten that you desired not to hear his name mentioned again, but that was because you thought he took the money, which he never did, papa. He borrowed eight hundred dollars from Uncle Mallory when he went from here, and he is working hard to pay it back again. He is in a machine-shop in Springfield, and he writes that he begins to think he has quite a genius for mechanics."

"That is his story. I don't believe it," Mr. Wilbraham affirmed, after turning it over in his mind for a moment.

"Now, papa, I think you are unjust to Victor," urged Agatha.

"You say he never took the money. How, then, will you account for its loss, and the condemning circumstances connecting the theft with his flight?"

Agatha had not thought of that. Victor's bare assertion that he had borrowed the amount needed to pay his debts was enough for her. She had believed it would convince her father too, and her disappointment that it did not was intense. For several moments she was unable to command her voice to speak; at last she said:

"Perhaps Vic could explain a part, or all of those circumstances. It will, at least, be easy to prove the truth or falsity of the statements in his letter, which you say you do not believe. If you are willing, I am going to Uncle Mallory's to-morrow, and then to Springfield to see Vic."

"You can go, if you like, but if you find his statements true, it will prove nothing about the money. My advice is that you stay at home. Still, as I said, you can go, if you like."

"For once, if you will forgive me, I must disregard your advice. I cannot forget that Victor is my brother."

"If you are determined to go, you had better wait until Thursday. I shall have to send Aaron to Boston then. I did not quite finish my business when I was there; so you can go with him the most of the way."

"Then I will wait," assented Agatha, glad that she could take her father's advice in the smaller, though she could not in the greater matter.

Mrs. Wilbraham did not come home that night. She had gone to visit a friend in Bridgenorth, Aaron believed.

The following morning Mr. Wilbraham ordered his horse harnessed, and rode to Sullivan. He went first to Mr. Bosworth, with whom he talked business for a while, then

asked carelessly whether a man by the name of Priestley had been stopping around there lately. Mr. Bosworth had no knowledge of such a person. Next, Mr. Wilbraham went to the different hotels in the place and examined their registers, but did not find the name he was looking for.

"The miscreant must have been here under an assumed name," thought the investigator, rubbing his brow and considering what was to be done next. He was not much of a detective. Besides, he feared to compromise his wife by pushing inquiries openly. Consequently, at the end of the day he returned no wiser than he went. Mrs. Wilbraham's handsome cutter with the bays attached was standing at the door, having just been driven in apparently. Mr. Wilbraham drove in by a less-used way, gave his horse in charge to Mike, and entered the house by a side door. He found his wife in her boudoir, warming herself at the register and reading a letter. She started and slipped the sheet into her pocket on seeing him.

"Give me that letter!" commanded Mr. Wilbraham, in an excited manner.

He believed that at last he was coming to something decisive, and every nerve was at its utmost tension.

"Whom do you think you are speaking to?" coolly demanded his wife.

"I am not to be trifled with. This has gone far enough. The letter! I want the letter!"

"You have a pleasant way of asking for it."

"Will you give it to me, I say?"

"Certainly. I have two or three others in my desk that I received while you were away. Shall I give you those also?"

She reached him a letter drawn from her pocket as she spoke. It was from her milliner, asking for information about the trimmings to be used for a bonnet.

"Do you want the others now?" his wife asked, tauntingly, when he had read it; "or perhaps you would like the key to my desk. Here it is. I believe it is customary, too, with the domestic spy or tyrant to keep an eye upon his wife's accounts. My books are in my dressing-room, in the upper drawer of my bureau. Shall I give you the key?"

"No."

"No? Then I shall beg leave to consider you but illly fitted for the role you have assumed. Perhaps you will have the goodness to pick up my letter, if you have done with it. You see you have thrown it on the floor."

He raised the half sheet and gave it to her, receiving a taunting "Thank you," for his trouble. The tone of her acknowledgement stung him.

"Madam," he said, severely, "I believe you are a very good actress, but I am on the trail of your secret. If I live I will hunt it down."

The woman's face blanched to an icy whiteness.

"It pleases you to deal in mysteries to-night," she said, in a quailing voice. "Has some fiendish Iago been trying to possess your mind with doubt of me?"

"It was Diomed, rather, I believe. Do you know a man of the name of Priestley?"

"No."

She looked him steadily in the face, having regained command of eye and feature.

"Why did you lie to me about breaking the carriage and going to Bridgenorth?"

"I was contriving a Christmas present for you at Sullivan, and feared you would find me out. It is a dressing-gown and slippers. I did not mean to give them to you until to-morrow, but it is no matter, I suppose."

She brought out from her dressing-room, thereupon, an elegant cashmere robe, and a pair of slippers embroidered in beads and worsted. Mr. Wilbraham began to feel ashamed of his suspicions.

"Perhaps I have been too hasty," he said, hesitatingly. "Thank you for your present."

"Yet," said his wife, with mournful pathos, "you do not trust me. In some way I have forfeited your good opinion."

With its pathos, her voice had an intonation of tenderness. She came nearer to him and laid her hand upon his. He began to feel anew the subtle fascination which she had always held over him. His anger melted away like ice in dogdays, and like a ghost when

"The glowworm shows the matin to be near,
And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire,"

the husband's suspicions vanished.

"Forgive me, Alluah," he entreated.

"Ah, now we are friends again, and Eve's paradise is regained," rejoined the woman, folding her arms around him. So they were reconciled.

And all the while this tender wife—this Eve boasting of her paradise regained—had in her pocket a letter running thus:

"Look out for breakers. Rip Van W—sat near Dan and me at the theatre last night, and heard us talking about my reason

for leaving Sullivan. Nothing was spoken out, but Rip has got the very d—l of suspicion on board of his craft. So you will need to steer warily. I send you an exact transcript of what we all said, that you may direct your course accordingly."

Then followed a report of their conversation at the theatre, with a ribald gibe or two in closing, and the signature S. P. This precious document Mrs. Wilbraham looked over once more when she was left alone, then hearing her husband returning, she slipped it hastily into her writing-desk.

CHAPTER XIII.

AGATHA'S JOURNEY.

THAT was Wednesday. On Thursday Agatha, accompanied by Aaron Colbraith, set off for Lawrence, whither her uncle had removed since her last visit at his house.

There was a sting in the morning air. The sun made poor work of shining through an atmosphere of frost, and before noon gave up the effort in disgust. It was one of those days when it is really exasperating to find that the mercury indicates a point a few degrees above zero, while we are positively certain that it ought to drop several degrees below—a day to make those whom necessity calls abroad hug their outer garments closely about them, though the cold being of that penetrating sort that pays little respect to thickness of attire, goes straight through the person, seeming to seek out the very heart.

Our travellers were fortunate enough to secure a seat near the stove, so that they did not suffer material discomfort from the frosty atmosphere when they were on board the train. Aaron proved to be an excellent travelling companion. Attentive, yet not officiously so; a ready talker when there was anything to talk about, and equally apt at silence when there was not; rather striking in looks, if not exactly handsome, with the air and manners of a cultivated gentleman; and, above all, so thoughtful of her comfort in all things. Agatha was not insensible, moreover, to the fact that certain chattering young ladies in their vicinity regarded him approvingly, and was as much amused as annoyed by the conjectures she overheard them hazarding as to the probable relations between Aaron and herself.

"I guess they are brother and sister," said one.

"Nonsense. More likely they are lovers," was the rejoinder.

"Not affectionate enough for that."

"Well-bred lovers are not in the habit of parading their tenderness before a gaping public. I am positive they are lovers."

Aaron looked up at Agatha with an amused smile.

"Which is right?" he asked, in as low a tone as the clatter of machinery would permit to be audible.

"I don't think either is entitled to distinction for great discrimination," replied Agatha.

"One is not, at least, but I should like to believe that the other is not so entirely wrong. Would it be very difficult, do you think, for you to consider me as your lover?"

"I think it would," replied Agatha, frankly.

"Do you dislike me so much, then?"

"No, it is not that. I believe I rather like you; but—"

"Then, if you please, I will not quite despair; and just now I will not tire you by urging the subject further. See, it is beginning to snow. The next station is Lawrence, is it not?"

"Yes."

They were not long in reaching it. The snow was coming down blindly as Aaron helped Agatha to the platform and engaged a hack for her.

"I have a great mind not to go on to Boston in this train," he said. "I don't like to leave you until I see you safe at your uncle's."

"There is not the least necessity for your waiting here. In fifteen minutes you may be just as sure of my being safe with my friends, as if you had seen me to the door."

"Good-by, then. I'm glad it is only for a little while."

Agatha returned his "good-by," and entered the carriage that had been secured for her, glad of its shelter from the cold and storm. Settling herself upon its cushions, her thoughts turned naturally upon her late travelling companion, and the question with which he had surprised her. Would it really be impossible, she wondered, for her to accept him as a lover? Such an occurrence, she believed, would give her father the greatest pleasure, and it was probable that she liked Aaron as well as she would ever like anyone, now that— And here the carriage stopped, and Agatha having alighted began looking for her *porte-monnaie* in order to pay the driver. It appeared, however, that she had no such article about her. Her pocket had

been picked, and she was moneyless. This fact she communicated to the driver, adding that luckily she would be among friends, and that he should have his pay as soon as she had spoken to Mr. Mallory. Mounting the steps then, she rang, and after some delay the door was opened by a decent looking colored woman.

"Is Mr. Mallory in?" asked Agatha, eagerly.

"Dere aint nobody in but me and 'Tuseleh. De rest of de family dey's trabbling for dere health down South."

"Are there none of the old servants here?"

"Only me and Tuseleh, and we aint so old as might be, 'siderin' his name, and me being his wife."

"I am Agatha Wilbraham. Mr. Mallory is my uncle. I have had my pocket picked, and have no money to pay for the hack that brought me here," explained the girl, who was growing rather anxious.

"You git out. We do' wan' no umposters heah."

"But I am no impostor," urged Agatha.

"You tell dat to de m'rinos," retorted the servant, shutting the door in Agatha's face. The latter in great perplexity turned to the waiting hackman.

"You have heard?" she said.

"Yes."

"What am I to do?"

The man appeared to be plunged in deep thought, from which he emerged presently to reply, "I give it up."

If it had been a conundrum Agatha would have given it up too with the greatest pleasure. As it was not, she bent her mind to considering it most intently.

"Do you know," she asked, presently, "whether the Rev. Mr. Colladay still lives in Lawrence?"

"Yes, he does. I took a fare to his house yesterday."

Agatha remembered having met this gentleman once at Mr. Leonardson's. She knew no one else in Lawrence. So, much as she disliked it, she felt obliged to apply to him for assistance. The hackman consented to take her to the clergyman's house. It was, however, with feelings of shrinking from the interview, and a half wish that she had not come, that she rang the bell on arriving at the place. Asking for Mr. Colladay, she sent up her name, and was soon met by him so cordially that she at once felt herself among friends. She hastily told her story. The hackman was paid and dismissed, and Agatha

ushered up stairs with the assurance that for that night, at least, she must regard herself as Mrs. Colladay's guest. It was a pleasant sitting-room into which the tired girl was shown, and Mrs. Colladay was just the sort of woman to give it a homelike feeling the moment one first set foot in it. As she went in Agatha had noticed a young man sitting in one of the deep windows, but it was growing dark, and she did not see who it was.

"I have the pleasure," Mr. Calladay observed, "of assuring you that you are not quite so much among strangers as you may think. This young man I presume you have seen before, Miss Wilbraham."

The young man could not do otherwise than come forward now. It was Wirt Leonardson. Agatha was grateful for the friendly twilight which she hoped hid her burning cheeks. It was her first meeting with Wirt since she had believed herself to have cause of offence against him, but she could not quite ignore him now. She contrived, however, to make her greeting convey to him that it was only out of consideration for the people whose guest he was, and to whom she was under obligation, that she noticed him so far.

To say that Agatha was surprised by this encounter would be to express her feeling feebly. What troubled her most in regard to it was that, despite her indignation at Wirt's baseness, she could not help feeling a sort of pleasure in seeing him once more. But she took particular heed that nothing of this should appear in her treatment of the young man. He felt that the stars were not further off than she, though only a table's length divided them.

Once in the evening it happened that for a short time they had the sitting-room to themselves. Directly, Agatha picked up a newspaper and began to read, with the appearance of being closely absorbed in a leader upon some theological subject. Wirt, in imitation of her obliviousness of him, stretched himself upon a sofa and pretended to take a nap. He had always boasted of being able to go to sleep in three minutes, and to wake when he liked. This Agatha remembered, and soon guessed from his breathing that the convenient faculty had been put in exercise. She laid down her paper then, and half turned so that she could watch his face. Feeling no longer the necessity to control her own features, they settled into an expression of mingled pain and tenderness, which Wirt, sud-

denly opening his eyes, discerned, and sprang quickly to her side.

"Agatha, will you tell me what you were thinking of?" he asked, with breathless eagerness.

"Of something that Aaron Colbraith said to me to-day," rejoined the girl, turning coldly away.

Wirt muttered something concerning Aaron that *might* have been a blessing, though I doubt it exceedingly. A moment afterward Mrs. Colladay came in with a tempting basket of fruit. A servant followed with knives, plates and napkins, and Mr. Colladay returning presently from a conference in the study with one of his deacons, an hour of cheerful talk over their fruit ensued, then it was time for retiring.

In the morning Agatha took leave of her friends, thanking them warmly for their hospitality. Wirt had supplied her with what money she needed, remarking that her father could refund it to him with less trouble than to Mr. Colladay.

"And if you object to receiving a favor from me, you may compute the interest to the smallest fraction of a mill, and add it to the amount when it is paid," he added, with a bitter smile.

Agatha accepted the loan, thanking him civilly but coldly. When she had taken her place in the train she saw Wirt come in and seat himself at a little distance from her. "I wonder how far he is going?" she thought, and felt a sort of protection from his nearness.

On they went, past station after station, seeing the same waiting crowds—or what might have been the same, they were so similar—at every depot. Now they were nearing Springfield. Now they had arrived there. Wirt handed Agatha to the platform and offered to procure a carriage for her.

"That attention you might accept from a stranger even," he said, significantly, in making the offer.

Agatha hesitantly accepted the attention. In general, women, even the most self-reliant, find it pleasant to be taken care of, especially in public places and among crowds. There was a little less coldness than she had shown him hitherto in Agatha's "Thank you," for this last civility. She half wished that he would offer to accompany her to the machine-shop, whither she was going to look for Victor. Then she recollected that Wirt had spoken her name slanderously, and taxed her—

self with want of dignity and self-respect, in feeling anything but hot anger towards him.

Her expedition, it soon appeared, was fated to be an unlucky one, in respect, at least, of the purpose for which it was undertaken. Her uncle's absence from home was the first headsway, and she now failed to find Victor. Even his name was unknown in the shop where she had expected to meet him. Agatha now remembered that he had asked her, in writing to him, to address to the number of his box, without using any name. She remembered the number, and going to the post-office, learned that this box belonged to a young man of the name of Abram Wild.

"That must be Victor. He has taken an assumed name," she inferred.

Returning to the shop she inquired for Abram Wild. He, it appeared, was a workman in the establishment, but had left the place the previous day. It was not known where he had gone, nor when he would return. He bore a good character, and had worked well when he first came. Lately he had been less punctual at his tasks. His boarding-place was unknown. That was the extent of the information gained. Agatha felt keen disappointment. She had hoped so much from this expedition. To return home with not a single doubt removed was disheartening in the extreme. It was all that was left for her, however. She stayed at a hotel that night, and set off the following morning. Once more she found Wirt Leonardson in the same car with herself.

"He watches me afar off," she thought, "just as that Hebrew sister did her brother who was hidden in the bulrushes."

A certain warmth of feeling came with the thought, which, if he had ventured to approach nearer, might have insured him forgiveness for forgetting her assurance that they must meet henceforth as strangers. But again came the recollection of that which she was constantly in danger of forgetting, and again she hardened her heart toward him.

By-and-by two men entered the car in a hilarious condition. One seated himself in front of Agatha, the other plumped himself down beside her. Both smelled strongly of whiskey. They were exceedingly talkative, calling each other Dan and Priestley. The former tried to draw Agatha into conversation, but her icy demeanor checked him in that particular. Wirt watched them with a vigilant eye. He saw that Agatha was an-

noyed and a little frightened. The men were growing more jovial every moment. Wirt left his place beside a respectable looking elderly lady, and bending over Agatha's shoulder, inquired, in a low tone:

"Would you prefer to exchange seats with me?"

"O, thank you," replied Agatha, with intense relief; and proceeded to make the change at once.

"I'd rather have the lady, blast you!" said Secker, when Wirt had taken Agatha's place.

"I dare say. But we can't always have our preferences indulged," returned the young man, coolly.

"That's so. If it wasn't, the hangman's card would be a superfluity, wouldn't it, Priestley?" rejoined the worthy, giving his comrade a poke in the side.

To this the other responded in choice slang. Wirt listened to their jargon until it became insufferable, then strolled off into another car. At Sullivan the two cronies left the train. Wirt did not approach Agatha again, except to see her supplied with a carriage at Eastberg, for she had not been expected home so soon, and none had been sent for her. It was not long before the lights from the slate house flashed out a welcome for her. And so the journey from which she had hoped so much was ended.

"Did you see him?" questioned Mr. Wilbraham, with suppressed interest, but Agatha fancied that his eyes looked hungry for good news of his son.

"He was not there," replied Agatha wearily, and proceeded to give an account of her journey from the time she reached Lawrence—not forgetting the fact of her indebtedness to Wirt Leonardson.

"Wirt Leonardson? I wonder you could, have consented to be indebted to him," interposed Mrs. Wilbraham, suavely.

"I could not well do otherwise. I should like the debt to be repaid immediately. You will not forget it, papa?"

"Certainly not. So Victor has taken another name. He did well in that. Well, we will trouble ourselves no more about him."

CHAPTER XIV.

AARON GOES A WOING.

AFTER that journey, foster it as she would, Agatha's indignation against Wirt Leonardson was on the wane. She remembered his care, the annoyances from which he had

saved her, his delicate avoidance of intrusion, and felt deep down in her heart, that he could never have spoken basely of her—felt further that he loved her, and began to think of possible explanations in the future, to be crowned, it might be, with reconciliation, which in turn might lead on to happiness unutterable.

She would take no steps to bring it about. For this she was too proud. But she trusted that Fate would show herself kind, and accomplish that which in her own imagination was always happening.

All this was far from favorable to Aaron's suit, but he bided his time in patience.

One day, it was midwinter now, there came to Agatha's ears a report which seemed to freeze into her very soul. It was concerning her late journey. Wirt Leonardson's name was connected with it, and the vile story was clearly traceable to his lips. Agatha heard it first from one of the quarrymen's wives, to whom she had shown kindness, and who "thought Miss Agatha ought to know what stuff there was a going."

It was at the hamlet that Agatha listened to the sickening recital. It seemed to her that she would never have strength to reach home afterward. She did, however, but with a white, wretched face that was piteous to see. She met Aaron in the hall. He gave one glance into her face, then took both her hands and led her into the parlor.

"Let me be your friend, Agatha. Tell me what it is—or—God pity us. I believe that I can guess. Somebody has been telling you."

"Yes," assented Agatha, in a hard dry tone. "Of course I was the last one to hear it."

"I hoped you would not hear it at all. O my love—O my darling. Is there nothing I can do to lessen your pain? Listen to me. There is a way in which people's mouths may be stopped. It is by—yet I cannot bear that you should think I presume upon your sorrow. I think I hardly know what I am saying. I only know that I would die to save you from pain."

"Thank you, Aaron."

"No, don't thank me. It is too conventional. Or, at least, the tone in which you speak it is suggestive of an immense distance between us, which I would that you might be able to bridge over with a word in answer to a question that I have long wished to ask you, but did not dare. The word is 'yes,' and the question, 'will you marry me?'"

"I have always supposed that you loved

Grace Leonardson," replied Agatha, her color kindling at the name.

A faint red crossed the young man's face, like a cloud flying athwart the moon's disc.

"I will not deny," he replied, after a moment's silence, "that at one time Grace interested me. It was a boyish passion. All young men have such experiences. The love that I have given you is something different. It cannot fail to be the controlling power of my life, whatever your answer may be. But I think you will not refuse me. Your father thinks well of me. He knows about—about what you have heard to-day, and it is his wish to see you my wife."

"I believe you are very generous, Aaron, but I do not love you. Forgive me if this avowal pains you."

"It does pain me, and—yes—I forgive you," said the young man, getting up and then seating himself again, his hand pressed firmly against his forehead, his nether lip held tight between his teeth. His appearance gave Agatha the impression of a caged lion, which if following the impulses of its wild nature, would foam and rage in its pain, and dash itself against the bars that held it, but obedient to the firm mastery of its keeper—whose violence is restrained from breaking forth. As it is impossible not to feel a certain admiration for the lion-tamer, so Agatha could not help feeling that there was a sort of grandeur in this young man's power of self-mastery, and therewith came the wish that she could spare him the pain of its exercise. Moved by a sudden impulse, she went to him and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"Agatha," he exclaimed with sudden vivacity, and then in a changed tone, full of pathos—"but no, I see how it is. You have not come to bid me hope, but only to say that you pity me."

"I do bid you hope. My life is not without its dead past, but it shall be left to bury its dead. It shall not taint and blight my future," she declared, with growing excitement. "If I had, by any act of my own, abated one morsel of that respect which is due to true womanliness, I would sooner die than accept your generosity. As it is, since you desire my love, I will love you, and may God help me as I am true to you."

But when he sought to take her in his arms she retreated.

"Not now, Aaron," she said. "I have declared that I will love you, and I will. Let that content you for to-day."

"Content me? It makes me supremely blest."

She looked at him steadily a moment as if weighing his words, then quickly gave him her hand, withdrew it as quickly when he would have raised it to his lips, turned and escaped from the room.

CHAPTER XV.

FOUND OUT—"WITH WHAT MEASURE YE METE."

AFTER the reconciliation with his wife, Mr. Wilbraham resolutely put away all thoughts of suspicion, likening himself unto Messrs. Ford and Page in the Merry Wives of Windsor, for the part he had acted, and declaring that he would thereafter

"Rather suspect the sun with cold,
Than her with wantonness."

In this mind he held, until a new incident put him "in his old lunes again," to quote Mrs. Page against Master Ford. There appeared to be a very good cause, however, for Mr. Wilbraham's "lunes."

This was after a lapse of some weeks. The days were lengthening now, and the midday air was genial with suggestions of coming spring, but the mornings and evenings still owned the supremacy of winter. On a certain morning, Mr. Wilbraham announced his intention of going to Bridgenorth, but after starting changed his mind and his direction as well, going to Sullivan instead. His business was with Mr. Bosworth. When it was completed, he got in a sunny window of that gentleman's counting-room looking toward the street, and chatting upon some matter of public interest.

"There goes a gay buck," Mr. Bosworth interrupted the conversation to say, as some man passed on the opposite sidewalk. Mr. Wilbraham looked across and knew the man at once. It was Priestley. At the same moment Mrs. Wilbraham came dashing by with her bays. She also saw the man, and making a slight halt, put up three fingers of her right hand, to which he responded by raising an equal number on his left hand, whereupon the woman gave her horse the rein and the bays dashed blithely on again.

Mr. Wilbraham felt the blood run cold within him. His wife had lied, then, when she said she did not know Priestley. There was no doubting that the gesture had been a signal on the part of both. What did it

mean? Suddenly it flashed upon the questioner, that on a nearly disused road, about a mile from town, there was a house once kept as a tavern, but useless for that purpose, now that the travel had been transferred to a less hilly road. This house was owned by a man generally known as "Three-Fingered Dick," from the fact that he lacked one finger from each hand. This, he shrewdly divined, explained the gesture. It was an appointment.

Starting to his feet, and struggling mightily for self-control, Mr. Wilbraham said briefly, "I must be off—good day, Bosworth;" went for his horse at a stable hard by and entering his sleigh, drove madly through the town, and out upon the lonely road just mentioned. He could see by the state of the track here that no sleigh had passed that day. Half way out to the house, there was a disused barn. He resolved to wait there and watch. The snow was off around the building, so that he could drive in without leaving any track to excite suspicion. Here he secreted himself then, and after waiting perhaps half an hour, saw his wife and Priestley riding leisurely by, the man with his arm around her, and her head down upon his shoulder.

Mr. Wilbraham was too benumbed to stir; or, at first, to think. But soon his brain began to be racked with laboring thoughts. Should he go on after and confront them? Should he strike them down in their shameless security? He felt it in his heart to do this, revenging himself thus upon those who had so dishonored him. Perhaps they were laughing even now at his credulity.

At that very moment the slumbering Rip Van Winkle might be the object of their gibes. He gnashed his teeth when he remembered how, when once awakened, he had been lulled to shameful drowsiness again by a lie, backed up by a look and tone of tenderness. The woman had the craft of Satan himself. He wondered, with a kind of savage scorn, whether she could not lie him out of his present convictions even.

"I swear, I believe she will say he is her brother, or her uncle, or her great-grandfather, and make me swallow down the lie," he thought, in scornful raillery of himself and her.

This brought him to a sudden decision. He would go on after them, and surprise them together. There should be no time given her for exercising her invention. He swung open the great barndoor, and went to his

horse's head to back him out. But a sudden gust of wind slammed the door to again, with a jarring crash. A loose timber was dislodged from a scaffold by the shock, and falling, struck against him, felling him senseless to the floor. How long he lay thus he did not know. When consciousness had returned, and memory, he had no longer the necessary strength or resolution for such an interview as he had resolved upon, even if it were not too late to effect the surprise he had planned. Once more he swung open the great door, fastening it back this time, and, when clear of the place, drove straight home. A part of the way his senses were in dire confusion, but the air, generous of its ozone, stimulated him, so that by the time he had arrived he felt much better, physically, while his mental torture was proportionally greater.

He reached home before his wife. For that he was well pleased. He strode up to her boudoir, meaning to make an examination of her papers. Peradventure he might light upon something that would add strength to the already strong case against her. Her desk was locked. He hunted for the key, but did not find it. He inserted the blade of his pocket-knife and wrenched open the lid. Then followed a hasty examination of her papers. He found the very letter from her milliner which she had given him to read, when, maddened with suspicion, he demanded it from her. The search, however, brought to light nothing of importance, until, angry and impatient, he flung it down heavily, when a false bottom was displaced. Beneath this, he found Priestley's letter of warning, and what proved to be a partial diary, covering a space of about twenty years, with frequent intervals of perhaps six or sometimes even twelve months, in which no entry had been made. Nevertheless, it gave a, sufficiently exact transcript of her life. From it, Mr. Wilbraham gathered that early in her married life she had quarrelled with and separated from her husband on account of one Dan Seeker, who, later, was himself supplanted by Tom Priestley. It was when deserted as she believed by the latter, that she came to East-berg. Her marriage with Mr. Wilbraham had been clearly one of interest, and she everywhere expressed contempt for him. The diary made mention of two visits from Seeker, at which large sums had been demanded as hush money. The first she hinted at having extracted from her husband's desk. "It wasn't Vic, then, after all," groaned Mr. Wilbraham,

pausing in his reading. The second time Aaron had been able to supply her. It had been about six months since she learned that Priestley's desertion of her was not voluntary, but had been occasioned by an enforced hiding from justice. It appeared that the woman had a real affection for this man, the strongest probably of which she was capable. Since that time she had been in constant communication with him. The diary ended with a burlesque account of her quarrel with her husband on Priestley's account, ridiculing the former without stint.

Such was the record—a maddening one to the deceived husband, who had often paused in his reading of it to groan aloud. He felt that he could easily play Othello's part, and smother *his* wife, too, with a pillow.

But presently, into the stormy tempest of his thoughts, there came the inquiry, "In what am I better than she? Of the same wrong which I have suffered from her, was I not guilty toward Sue? 'With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.'" This passage kept recurring to his mind. If he sought to escape it by execrations of his wife's baseness, he was headed off by the thought of his own guilt, and ever upon the heels of that remembrance came like a judgment against him, this passage, "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." He had meted out death to Sue. It was fitting that death should be meted out to him. What had he to live for? Revenge? If he were sinless himself, he might lift his hand against sinners. Now he could not. Dishonored, beggared of all that makes home blest, a prey to remorse, what could he do but die? And still, like a relentless fate that haunting passage pursued him. He took a pen, wrote it at the bottom of the record he had just been reading, signed his name, and withdrew to his own room. Here he sat down and wrote a letter. It was only a few lines to Vic. When he would have written more, he found himself unable to command his thoughts so far as to put them into intelligible sentences. The letter merely stated that, by accident, the writer had made a discovery which fully acquitted his son of the theft that had been charged upon him at his leaving home; that he—the writer again—entreated forgiveness for his harshness at their last interview, and that he was his affectionate father.

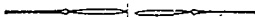
When it was written he mounted his horse, and rode to the village to post the letter. On

returning, he went once more to his room. Just as he closed the door, he heard the tinkle of bells, and the tramp of his wife's bays in the carriage-drive. A frenzied fire came into his eyes. He went to a window and looked out. The woman was there, handsome, smiling, secure. A loaded pistol lay beneath his hand. He took it up and pointed it toward her as she stood giving some directions to Mike about the horses. But the thought of Sue and his infidelity to her restrained him in the very act of firing. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." It was death to Sue. Why not to me?" Unhesitatingly he turned the weapon against his own heart. Its sharp report reached Mrs. Wilbraham's ears as she

ascended the stairs. A guilty terror struck through her heart. The sound of the pistol was succeeded by a fall. She was too much a coward to go immediately to the room whence the sound had proceeded, but shot into her boudoir. Here her rifled desk, disordered papers and journal, lying where he had thrown it down, told the whole story.

"I must get to him first," she thought, starting up and battling with her cowardice. "I must see whether he has taken any measures to expose me"

She went across to his room accordingly. He lay where he had fallen, and was quite dead. The woman hastily satisfied herself that she had nothing to fear from any papers about him, and then gave the alarm.



"With what Measure ye Mete."

BY HESTER EARLE.

PART SIXTH.

CHAPTER XVI.

MORE TRAGEDY.

AGATHA'S grief and horror were extreme. So too were Aaron Colbraith's. There was no doubting his sincerity in this. His face, pale and haggard, showed that he mourned truly for his "best friend."

A telegram was sent to Springfield, but Victor had left that place, and no one knew where to address him. Consequently the message failed of reaching him.

The whole community was in a stir. Temporary insanity was assigned—and rightfully perhaps—as the cause of the tragedy. The universal tribute to the dead was one of praise. Those who had transacted business with him spoke of his integrity, the poor of his charity, all said "it is a good man who is gone"—until his will had been read and its provisions made known, that is. Then there were many who thought his children, and especially Victor, had been treated unjustly, and numerous were the animadversions indulged in against the insidious influence of stepmothers.

The will had been found in Mr. Wilbraham's desk. It was dated a month back. The witnesses were two of the house-servants, Mike and Rhoda. A half of the whole property was given to Mrs. Wilbraham. The remaining half to Agatha on condition that she married Aaron Colbraith. Otherwise, she was to receive five hundred dollars yearly from the estate so long as she remained unmarried, and at her marriage seven thousand dollars, provided it were not Wirt Leonardson whom she married, in which event she was to receive nothing—the whole going to Aaron Colbraith. Victor's portion from the estate was five dollars.

Agatha felt the wrong to her brother deeply. Where was Victor? Why did he not write to her? Days and weeks went by, bringing no answer to these questions. Aaron was very kind and tender meanwhile, but his mother—or did Agatha fancy it?—was be-

ginning to show some acidity of temper towards her stepdaughter.

One day, about two months after her father's death, Agatha, who had been spending the day at the hamlet taking care of a sick woman, was walking home at dusk, when she was overtaken by Wirt Leonardson.

"My God, Agatha!" he broke out, impetuously; "what is this that they have been telling you about me?"

Agatha turned white, then crimson, and was so shaken that she seemed in danger of falling.

"Was it not true, Wirt?" she gasped, faintly.

"True! True that I have slandered you, whom I hold as the embodiment of purity—whose good name is dearer to me than my life—whom I love as— God pity me, Agatha, I have no right to talk to you of love—and you the betrothed wife of Aaron Colbraith. But this vile story which I have just heard has bereft me of my senses, I think. Tell me, for Heaven's sake, unless you want to see me go mad outright, that you do not believe it."

"I do not now," affirmed Agatha, in a low tone.

"But you have believed it. It is this that has come between us."

"Yes."

"O Aggie! And it is too late now. Let me go back and recall the forgiveness that I gave that woman. I cannot forgive her."

"What woman is it?"

"One of those who are sick at the hamlet. Dr. Layard was not at home, and I went in his place. With the fear of death before her she confessed that she had lied to you about me, having been put up to it by some one whom she would not name. But I can guess who it was. I have known for a long time that Mrs. Wilbraham was my enemy."

"I am very glad to have heard this," said Agatha, slowly, as if measuring every word before it was uttered. "It has been exceedingly unpleasant for me to believe that you were less my friend than you had always seemed."

"Can you think what it has been to me to know that I had lost you? what it is now to feel that this disclosure has come too late? But is it really too late? You would be penniless, it is true, if you were to marry me instead of Aaron, but I think I shall succeed in my profession, and I can work for both."

"No, Wirt. It cannot be. My word is pledged to Aaron. Then I could not go against the will—his will—by marrying you. Now good-night"—for Agatha had reached home by this time. She gave him her hand, which he pressed to his lips, then strode hurriedly away. Agatha waited a little among the tulips and hyacinths to recover her composure before going in. Some one entering the grounds from the street saw her through the lingering twilight, and keeping in the shade of the shrubbery, came upon her suddenly as she leaned over one of the flower-beds. It was Victor. Agatha uttered a hasty exclamation, struggled ineffectually for self-control, and sobbed uncontrollably upon her brother's shoulder.

"Don't, Agatha, little sister. There, Aggie."

Thus brokenly he tried to soothe her, but broke down in the attempt, and the two wept together.

"If only he had forgiven you," she sobbed.

"He did. I had a letter from him. I got it yesterday with yours. I was away from Springfield, and knew nothing of what has happened until then. He seemed from the letter to have suspected me of taking some money when I went away, but wrote that an accidental discovery had proved me innocent. The letter was very kind. It must have been written the same day that it happened."

"O Victor! This takes half the bitterness away."

"It does. I think I could not have borne it else. I don't care for the property, since I know that he forgave me at the last."

They sat together a long time on one of the garden benches. By-and-by Victor was led on to speak upon his own affairs.

"I believe that being thrown upon my own resources was the best thing that could have happened to me," he said. "I should never have done anything here, and I really have accomplished something since I went away. I resolved that I would that night when you told me that you believed in me, and always should. Well, Aggie, I have turned out an inventor, and with mine invention I have paid my debts, besides retaining a share, which is likely to pay me something here-

after. It was about that business that I have been away from Springfield."

Agatha now mentioned her journey to that place, and the disappointments consequent upon it.

"When did you say it was? About the last of December? O, I remember now. There was something queer about that. Somebody telegraphed to me from New York that Uncle Mallory was very sick there, and wanted to see me immediately. So I went on at once, but the whole thing proved to be a sell. What did you think?"

"I was afraid," returned Agatha, smiling, "that Abram Wild was trying to keep his name in countenance."

"So you found out about Abram Wild?"

"Yes, Victor."

"When I went away from here I had lost all faith in Victor Wilbraham, and with good reason, too, I think, for a wild career he had led me. So I determined to sink the old man, name and all. Perhaps pride had something to do with it, too, for I had never contemplated seeing Victor Wilbraham in the character of a working man; and maybe it was as much a freak as anything. It has been rather awkward work though. I would not advise any one whose intentions are honest to undertake the management of an *alias*. I dropped mine three months ago. Will Hartley ran against me then, and called me Wilbraham before half a dozen of the boys, and after that Abram Wild was banished off the boards."

They went into the house soon afterwards. Mrs. Wilbraham looked annoyed at seeing Victor, and put on her coldest demeanor. It was plain from her manner that she meant him to understand that he had no right there. Aaron, however, was more cordial.

"It is a sad coming home for you, Vic," he said. "I—we all—have felt what has happened very deeply."

He spoke with real feeling, and Victor, though he found himself unable to reply, shook his hand cordially.

"I wonder," interposed Mrs. Wilbraham, cuttingly, "that you should have thought it necessary to come at all—and especially at this late day. You must have supposed that, though we don't intend to expose your conduct to the world, we can never overlook—"

"Mother," interrupted Aaron, "I think you do not quite know what you are saying. I am sure we are all very glad to see Victor at home again."

"Excuse me, Ronny, but I think I do quite know what I am saying. It is that *we* could hardly be expected to overlook in Victor Wilbraham the fault which his father found it impossible to forgive. He, poor man, had a good deal on his mind. It is no wonder—"

Here she put her handkerchief to her eyes, leaving the rest to be inferred. Victor bit his lip nearly through before replying.

"You are mistaken," he said, then. "My father acknowledged himself in error before—Will you have the goodness to read this letter?"

"Written after he had become insane, that is perfectly evident," said the woman, spitefully, after looking the letter over.

"Come, Victor," said Agatha, rising abruptly.

"I don't mean," put in Mrs. Wilbraham, hastily, "that Victor is not welcome to stay as long as he likes."

"I should suppose not," answered Agatha, incisively. "I believe that *I* have some right here yet, and as long as that is the case my brother can hardly be an intruder in his own home."

She put her hand within Victor's arm as she spoke, and they went out together. Aaron, from the window at which he stood, could see them strolling through the moonlit grounds. Unpleasant reflections were laboring in the young man's brain. He felt the ignominy of his position—felt that he would rather by far be the disinherited Victor than himself. By-and-by, without turning around, he said:

"Mother, I'd have given anything rather than you should say what you did to Victor, for Agatha's sake, if for nothing more."

"The sooner you break off with that girl the better," retorted Mrs. Wilbraham, with a vicious snap to her words. "I want to have done with the whole lot of them."

"What am I to think of this? Who was it that urged me—compelled me against my will—to become engaged to her?"

"Who was it? I, of course. Things were different then. It was the property I wanted for you, not her. You can have that now, in any event."

"Mother," said Aaron, in a tone of great weariness, "I am heartily sick of all this."

"Bah!"

"Victor has always been kind to me."

"Patronizingly so, the insolent upstart."

"No, there was no patronage in his manners. If I, knowing what your plans were,

could have been hypocrite enough to allow it, we might have been close friends. If he had been an insolent upstart, as you call him, I could bear my position better. But he has always treated me well, and to his father I owe—everything."

"That is a filial sentiment. I suppose you owe me nothing then."

"It is true I owe you something," replied the young man; but one might have guessed from his tone that the obligations were not such as to make great demands upon his gratitude. Mrs. Wilbraham looked contemptuous, but did not reply. Aaron traced invisible characters upon a window-pane with the nail of his little finger, and was also silent. But at last he turned, and, in a voice quite unlike his own, said:

"How will it be, mother, if it is true that, 'With what measure we mete it shall be measured to us again?'"

Mrs. Wilbraham started and grew deathly pale. It was in those words that her husband had passed judgment against her, when the iniquities of her life were laid bare before him. What had put it into Aaron's mind to fling them at her now?

"Are you ill, mother?" inquired her son, starting towards her.

"No, only a little tired and nervous. I believe I will go to bed."

She went to her room directly. Nervous she certainly was; too nervous to lie quietly in bed, she decided, and began pacing to and fro in her boudoir. Tiring soon of that, she sat down in a velvet-cushioned easy-chair, leaned back in it, and tried the force of ridicule for overcoming her present mood.

"A warning? Bah! I must be an idiot to think there is anything in it. With what meas— Fool! Dolt! If you can think of nothing else but that, stop thinking. I believe Aaron is getting unmanageable. What was it he said about Victor? 'With what measure ye mete'— Perdition! There it is again. I must write to Priestley to-morrow. How long has it been since I saw him? It was—let me see—I can't think. I believe I am losing my memory. It was—"

Here a window blind flapped to, and she started as if she had been struck. She recognized the sound immediately, but still felt a creeping tingling sensation through all her veins. Settling herself once more in her chair, she tried to remember what she had been thinking about, but it was gone from her. Nothing would come but that passage

which had so disturbed her, and which she was far from wishing to recall. "I can't stand this," she averred, in desperation, and brought from a drawer a vial, labelled "Morphia," from which, with an unsteady hand, she proceeded to drop a potion into a teaspoon. Once she lost her count, and, pouring it back, began again.

Having swallowed the potion, she replaced the vial and spoon as she had found them, and, going into her bedroom, began to undress. Her brain was fatiguingly active, but the thoughts she wished to dwell upon kept slipping away from her. When robed for the night, she turned down the wick, and carried her lamp into the outer room, not liking the gas from kerosene in her sleeping apartment. Here, through an open blind, she saw a meteor falling, a vivid line of fire marking its track through the air. To her, in her excitement, it seemed a phenomenal light, and sent a chill through and through her.

"What makes me so nervous to-night, I wonder!" she exclaimed, with a shiver. "The light was nothing, of course; and yet I never saw anything like it before. If it should be a warning—With what measure?—For Heaven's sake, let me go to sleep and put a stop to this. O, I was going to take some morphia. That will make me rest."

Her memory certainly was failing. She had quite forgotten the potion she had already taken. Her lamp was lighted again, and more of the liquid dropped into a spoon.

"There, now, I shall sleep," she murmured, when it had been taken, and went immediately to bed.

Yes, she slept—slept the sleep that knows no waking. Her maid found her thus in the morning, and, retreating in a great fright, ran against Aaron in the passage.

"What is the matter, Rhoda?" demanded the young man.

"The mistress. O, the dear God! And only to think that last night she was just as well as ever!" answered the maid, moaning and wringing her hands.

"Do you mean—"

"They'll call it heart disease, I know. That is what they always say, but I think it was just a visitation of God. O, to think of two going so sudden-like, and only two months between them!"

Aaron left the chattering fear-struck maid, to find that what her words implied was but too true. "A visitation of God." The phrase struck home to his heart. Mingling with his

grief—for she was his mother, and he had loved her—he felt a stern sense of retributive justice in the manner of her end. He could not doubt that her death was accidental. She was not one to take her own life with deliberate forethought, being too much in love with her pleasures, such as they were, to leave them willingly. She had been a scheming, unscrupulous sinning woman, and this was the end. The event carried its own lesson, which her son read with humiliation and trembling. Would he heed it?

CHAPTER XVII.

CONFESSION.

A MONTH had gone by since the funeral. Victor was still at home, but was going away the next day. He felt himself an alien here, and longed to be at work. The tables had been strangely turned. It was he now, instead of Aaron, who talked of winning fortune for himself. He accepted his position cheerfully. Experience had already taught him the superior value of a dollar earned to one that has cost no effort in the getting. It had taught him more—the folly and wickedness of dissolute courses—the superior manliness of a well-governed life. The lesson had cost him dear, but he felt that it was worth the price. Except in his unfailing good-humor, he was almost wholly unlike the Victor we have known.

Agatha, too, was to leave home on the morrow. She was going to her Uncle Malloy's for a season. Probably she would stay there until her marriage. Aaron had made no allusion to that lately, but she thought it was from having so much else to think of. Agatha was well satisfied to have the subject deferred. If left to her choice, it might indeed have been postponed indefinitely, but she hardly expected to be permitted to leave home without having the wedding-day fixed.

She and Victor were sitting together now in the spacious front parlor. Its windows overlooked the miniature lake, the fountain and the naiad at the fountain. Between were rhododendrons and kalmias laden with bloom. The hum of bees and the chirp of birds came through the open window. A crimson-breasted humming-bird hung over the flowering shrubs, stirring the air with its melody of motion. Agatha, after a long gaze outward, turned toward Victor.

"I wish," she said, "that I could be better reconciled to your losing it all, Victor."

"And I wish," returned her brother, "that I felt half as well satisfied with your future prospects as I do with my own. It seems to me that Aaron Colbraith is not the one for you to marry. I always thought it would be Wirt Leonardson."

Agatha changed color, but could not command her voice to reply.

"If," pursued Victor, "you love Aaron, it is all right, of course. But I don't think you ought to feel bound by the will. I would sooner give up the property than marry one I did not love."

"If it was only the property. But I cannot go against his wish. And, besides, I have promised."

"You must do what you think right, of course," said Vic; to which there came no reply. Agatha was toying with her tassels—adjuncts to her morning-wrapper. Presently the door was pushed open, and Aaron came in. His face was strikingly pale, but it had a kind of glow, confined chiefly to the eyes, which was quite unusual. He carried a spirit lamp and half a bunch of matches.

"Did you think we were groping in darkness here?" Victor inquired, jestingly.

"Yes—and I mean to enlighten you. You will know me for a scoundrel then, but no matter. I have known myself as one for a long time."

"I don't understand," said the wondering Vic.

"No, I suppose not. If I could make my confession without involving one who is dead it would be much less hard; but I have determined to let no personal considerations hinder me from setting right what is wrong, so far as I am able. This," producing a paper from his pocket, "has been known as your father's will. It is not an honest will."

"Not an honest will! How can that be?" demanded Victor, examining the document critically. "This is certainly my father's signature."

"It is, but the name was written, probably in some idle moment, at the bottom of a blank sheet."

"And the witnesses, Mike and Rhoda, were they parties to the fraud?"

"They were asked to write their names here by a man who professed to be able to determine character from chirography. They had often signed documents for your father without knowing their contents. Consequently they would be unable to distinguish this from other papers containing their sig-

natures. I had no hand in contriving the will, but I guessed its origin, and yet consented to receive benefit from it. It is my wish now to restore that of which you have been defrauded. The will has not yet been offered for probate. Have I your permission to destroy it?"

"Yes, burn the thing, by all means," assented Victor.

Aaron lighted the lamp he had brought, and the sheet—curling and blackening, with red flames shooting up, and a blue light at the base—was presently reduced to a black brittle residuum. In that form it was given to the winds, which crumbled and carried it whithersoever they would. Aaron turned to Agatha then.

"This leaves you untrammelled," he went on. "There should never have been any thought of marriage between us. I perjured myself in swearing love for you, and you have had a constant fight with your own heart since you accepted me. That the course I pursued was urged upon me affords me no excuse. I was eaten up with ambition—the ambition that grasps for wealth and position, no matter at what cost. Yet there was another part of myself that respected honest integrity and a generous preferring of another to one's self. My life since I came here, and especially since my return from college, has been a constant struggle between these two selves, but the worse was always the winning party. For the gratification of my ambition, it seemed necessary that I should marry you. So, knowing that you cared for Wirt Leonardson, I lent myself to the plot for defaming him. I even put him up to accompanying you to Springfield, by a mysterious intimation, conveyed to him in a telegram, of impending peril to you on the way. You know what use was made of that journey. My mother would have scattered the slanders against you broadcast, but I vowed that if she did, I would confess the whole. So, in reality, your name has not been touched by scandal, though it was necessary that you should be made to believe that it had been. To your father, indeed, the stories were made known, but to no one else except those who were in the plot. I cannot ask you to forgive me—"

"I forgive you then without being asked," interrupted Agatha; "and allow me to congratulate you," she went on, with shining eyes, "upon the victory your better self has gained this day."

"Thank you," said Aaron, with a good deal of feeling. "But my confession is not yet at an end. You, Victor, have been wronged otherwise than by the will. It was with a settled purpose of rising on your disgrace, that I always encouraged your wild courses in college and elsewhere. I had no spite against you, but self-interest led me on. I did still worse. I helped to fasten upon you the offence of having taken a sum of money from your father's desk, on the night of your leaving home. I also was responsible for the ruse that took you away from Springfield at the time of Agatha's visit there. Having consented to the first act of wickedness, I found that others were continually necessary to back it up. I was not in love with sinning, but I believed it necessary. Your father's death was the first thing that made me feel the enormity of my guilt. I was sincerely attached to him. I knew that while he had been uniformly my friend, I had been guilty of base deception and ingratitude towards him. Then came that later shock—that of my mother's death. I have never been at peace one moment since. When conscience had once got me in hand, it disdained to show any mercy. Confession and reparation were my only resource. Without them I must have gone mad or died."

Victor started up with outstretching hand. "We'll let the past go, Aaron," he said, stamping with one foot in his eagerness, as if the whole might be stamped into oblivion. "Let us be friends."

"I appreciate your generosity," returned Aaron. "It may be that in the future friends will be possible for me. The business I think you will find in good order. I go away from here to-morrow."

"What is that for? I shall want you at the quarries. Besides, you will have to stay to take care of your own property. As there was no will, a third of the property belonged to your mother, and goes, of course, to you."

"You are mistaken. My mother had only a life interest in the estate, since there were no children by the marriage."

"I don't believe it," obstinately asserted Victor. "If that is the law, we will have it reconstructed, or rather we will make one of our own to suit this particular case."

"That is quite unnecessary. I can take nothing from the estate. I shall go West and try teaching for a while. Afterwards I may work into something better."

They could not shake his resolution, though

Agatha added her persuasions to Victor's. He thanked them gratefully, but persisted in his denial.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE END OF ALL THINGS—PERTAINING TO THE STORY.

IN the press of events we have neglected Grace Leonardson, for which we beg her pardon. We are not going to present her now in the character of a lovelorn maiden, inasmuch as, outwardly, at least, she bore no resemblance to that oft-cited personage. It is true that Aaron's note in reply to her own had momentarily crushed her down to the very earth. But her woman's pride afforded her a strong rallying force. A little afterward she went away from home for a visit of several weeks, and at her return you would not have guessed that she had gone through a period of mental disturbance, wherein she had quaffed to its dregs the cup of bitterness. Her associates found her the same laughing merry-hearted maiden as they had always known in Grace Leonardson. There was this difference, however. Formerly her mirth had been like a bird's song, gushing out spontaneously. Now it had been put into harness, and came at the will of its mistress.

She met Aaron Colbraith in society as usual. True it was impossible to stay the color that persisted in dyeing her cheeks at sight of him, but she would not turn out of her way to avoid him. "He should see that she was in no danger of dying for him." So, at their casual encounters, she talked to him with cool indifference, or oftener with audacious raillery, almost maddening him at times by her piquancy, and beauty, and seeming unconcern. She refrained, however, from visiting Agatha, and the latter never went to the parsonage now, through fear of encountering Wirt. All through the winter and spring, therefore, the two friends met but rarely. They had begun to doubt, even, whether they were any longer friends.

But Grace had heard that Agatha was about leaving home, and felt that she could hardly let her go without calling on her. Accordingly, on the afternoon of that day whose morning had witnessed Aaron Colbraith's confession, she walked out for that purpose. When she reached the house, she was told that Agatha and Victor had gone to ride, but were expected home soon. Not wishing to have had her walk for nothing,

Grace went in to wait for them. She found it dull sitting alone in the parlor, and went out presently to have a look at Agatha's flowers. Immediately afterward she regretted having done so, for Aaron Colbraith was coming up one of the garden walks, and it was now too late to escape him by retreating. Summoning up her waning courage, therefore, Grace addressed him with the laughing inquiry:

"Have you come to warn me off your grass, as the brass and copper founder did that architectural trespasser, the amiable Mr. Pecksniff?"

"If you are trespassing, I, at least, have no right to warn you off. The grass is not mine."

"Not yours! I thought—"

"Grace," interrupted Aaron, with some vehemence, "let me ask your forgiveness, now that I have the opportunity. I am going away to-morrow. It is not likely that I shall ever return to Eastberg. You must despise me very heartily, I know, but I should like to hear you say that you forgive me."

"Going away? Never coming back to Eastberg? I am dull, I dare say, but I don't see how that can be."

"I must tell you the whole, I see. At first I felt inclined to spare myself that additional humiliation, but it doesn't matter, I suppose."

He thereupon dashed into the story which he had told that morning, sparing himself in no respect.

"You see," he said, when the tale was done, "what a scoundrel I have been—and in nothing more than in my treatment of you. You have reason to congratulate yourself that you are well rid of me."

"There is more joy in heaven," said Grace, impressively, "'over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance.'"

Aaron made the circuit of two or three flower-beds, then came back to his former position near Grace.

"I think you do forgive me, Grace," he said, his voice tremulous with feeling.

"Forgive you! Indeed I do—as I hope—" What more she would have spoken was hindered by an uncontrollable burst of tears.

"Thank you, dear girl, and don't cry, please. I am not worth the smallest fractional part of one of these precious drops. Yet they comfort me. I shall carry their memory with me. Good by now. Tell Wirt as much of what you have heard as is neces-

sary for undoing the mischief between him and Agatha."

He took the girl's offered hand, raised it to his lips, murmured "good-by" once more, and, rapidly retreating, was soon lost to sight in the thick-set shrubbery.

Grace had lost her inclination to make a call that day, but went loiteringly home. It was a hard task—that of telling Wirt—which Aaron had set for her. She found her brother in the garden on reaching home, but shrank from speaking to him then. Two or three other excellent opportunities were lost from the same cause. It was not until the following evening that, hearing Wirt come in, she ran down without giving herself time to think, and told him all the story.

The same evening Wirt went to see Agatha, whose visit to the Mallorys had been deferred. Their conference was one of interest—at least to themselves. Its results will probably surprise no one of our readers. "Dearest" and "darling," and other tender epithets were rather frequently employed during its progress, and it somehow happened now and then that Agatha's lips proved as stumbling blocks to Wirt's, whereby frequent concussions were produced—not, however, with any serious results.

Ah! that was a golden summer that followed. Love was queen regnant, and Happiness the chief handmaiden in her train. In September Wirt and Agatha were married. Several years have gone by since, but happily Love has not yet been dethroned. Wirt is Dr. Leonardson now, and is accounted a skillful and most humane physician. Among the poor he is especially popular, his ministrations being without money and without price; but that he can well afford, for his interest in the quarries supplies him with a handsome yearly income.

Victor is really growing quite an old bachelor; not a rusty, crusty one, however, but genial and sunny-hearted. His quarries are prosperous. He is accounted a shrewd man of business. His leisure time, nevertheless, is mostly given to mechanics. Before long he hopes to give to the world a valuable and somewhat remarkable invention. I shall not tell you what it is, because in that case you might go to work upon the hint, and claim the invention as your own.

There is something yet to tell about Grace Leonardson. Up to last winter, she steadily refused all offers of marriage, though her beauty and her winsome appearance brought

her several that might have been accounted unexceptionable. Then—last winter that is—going to a Western city for a visit, she heard everywhere the praises of a certain Professor Colbraith, who had lately accepted a professorship in the institution in that place. It was not long before Grace and the professor met and were introduced—a superfluous ceremony, by the way, for they knew each other very well already. It was a surprise to each to learn that the other was unmarried. Afterwards it was noticed that Professor Colbraith went into society much more than he had done hitherto—went, in fact, wherever he was likely to meet that pretty Miss Leonardson. The change in Aaron Colbraith had been radical. The axe laid at the root of the tree had done its work well. I do not mean to intimate that he had all at once be-

come a perfect character. Let us not look for such among the progeny of Adam. But, having striven resolutely for the mastery of his faults, he had with considerable difficulty become that character said to be greater than he that taketh a city—one that ruleth himself, that is. He was still ambitious, but his ambition, no longer a lawless depredator, had been made subject to principle. His talent was fast gaining him distinction. As a lecturer he was much sought. He was beginning to be known, too, as a brilliant writer of essays and of scientific papers.

Such was the man in whose society Grace was now frequently thrown. She had never quite lost her old tenderness for him. He, on his part, had retained his early love for her. Need the result be chronicled?



YELLOW FOOT.

BY LOUISE DUPEE.

"I CAN'T bear it any longer!" sobbed Syl, rubbing her little blue check sleeve across her eyes. "Everybody scolds me so hard, and everybody is so cross. Nobody cares for me a bit, and I'm going to run away! If I do the least thing, they all cry out, 'O, what a bad child!' Debby said she shouldn't wonder if I came to the gallus, 'cos I got into such a passion about having my hen sold this morning. O my poor old Yellow-foot!" And the remembrance of this most grievous of her wrongs brought a fresh burst of tears, and the rickety old back doorsteps whereon she was sitting threatened to come down every time a great sob shook her plump little body.

It was very pleasant and bright there in the backyard, where the fowls were all congregated, keeping up their contented gabble in the sunshine. There were Gold-neck, and Silverwing, and Cripple-crown, and Speckle, with their numerous half-grown sons and daughters. There were saucy Red-cap and domineering old Round-robin, their two husbands, who, every now and then, when they thought their garrulous wives were making themselves heard more than was necessary, stretched their long necks and gave utterance to deafening sounds to drown them out. Syl usually delighted in the society of these feathered friends, but she could not bear to look at them now, for Yellow-foot was missing. Yellow-foot, who was by far the most fascinating of the flock, with her shining black dress, her pert little head with its jaunty little cap, which she used to cock so knowingly first on one side and then on the other, and her dainty little yellow legs and feet that looked as though they were encased in the finest of kid. Then, besides, she was Syl's own hen; at least, she had always considered her as her property. She took a fancy to her in her chickenhood, and had always been allowed to call her her own; and no one had made any objection to her claiming that industrious biddy's eggs. She was very eccentric in her chickenhood, and wasn't considered quite as promising as her brothers and sisters. Indeed, Debby went so far as to say that she

was weak-headed; and at last she got the name of the "crazy chicken." She had a singular fancy for turning somersets when she first came out of the shell; then she used to be seized with sudden desires for flight, and would astonish her sedate old mother beyond measure by starting up without any warning, to chase an imaginary fly from one corner of the yard to the other, leaving the rest of the brood peeping in timid surprise from under the parent wing. But though she did have such a desire to use her legs, they did not seem to serve her very well, for, after running a while in a very unsteady manner, she used to topple over headlong, and often made many vain attempts to pick herself up again. Her mother did not approve of her eccentric habits, by any means; and after remonstrating long and gravely on the subject, finally gave up in despair, and disowned her entirely. But Syl liked her better than any chicken she ever saw, because she was so funny; and when her mother forsook her, and she went peeping desolately about the barnyard, Syl cared for her. She warmed her little downy body in her own tender hands, and every night put her into a tiny basket beside the kitchen hearth, and covered her with cotton wool, where, after a few satisfied chirps, chickie wandered away into as fair a chicken dreamland as was found by those who were tucked under their mother's breast in the barn. So she grew and thrived, and bade fair to become a right-minded hen; and instead of calling her the crazy chicken, they called her Syl's chicken; and Syl, who named all the fowls, called her "Yellow-foot," and was very proud of her. Everybody acknowledged her beauty and worth as she grew older. Her brothers and sisters were glad to admit her back into their circle, though her mother, Mrs. Blackbill, still regarded her with rather puzzled, suspicious looks, and was wont to be rather meditative in her society. The roosters were all zealous to scratch up a nice bit for her, and Debby declared that she was going to be a wonder for laying!

"Well," said Syl, "she would have been

dead long ago if it hadn't been for me; and I'm going to have her for mine."

She and Yellowfoot were very intimate. Yellowfoot would come at her call, no matter how far away she was, and she used to fly of her own accord upon Syl's shoulder; and when Syl stroked her glossy back, or fed her with some dainty bit from the table, she expressed her satisfaction in the most musical of hen language. She rarely wandered away into the meadow with the other hens, but kept about the back door, where she could peep in at the folks in the kitchen, and made herself a sly little nest under the currant bushes, where she deposited an egg every day. Syl grew more and more attached to her as time went on; and what was her dismay, on coming home from a pilgrimage in the woods one morning, to find that she had been sold, together with a half dozen chickens, to Deacon Smith, who had taken a sudden fancy for poultry raising!

She missed her hen at once, and after she had searched and called in vain for some time, her mother told her what had happened.

For a moment Syl stood transfixed with surprise; then she gave vent to her grief and indignation in a stream of tears and reproaches.

"What right had anybody to sell her hen when she was gone, she should like to know? her own Yellowfoot, who knew her, and liked her so much, and she liked her better than anything—better than anybody on the place!"

"Why, Syl," said her mother, a meek hard-worked woman, who had so much care that she hadn't time to pay much attention to her little girl, any way. "I knew you liked the hen, but I thought you'd rather sell her, as the deacon offered such a good price for her. There are plenty of chickens that are going to be prettier hens than she is, and you may have any one of them you want to take her place. The deacon took a fancy to her because she was so black, and he wouldn't have any other. He says black hens are the best for laying."

"I won't have any other hen!" screamed Syl, stamping her foot. "But I will have Yellowfoot! Deacon Smith shall give her up! She was stolen from me, and I will tell him so!"

Poor Syl! she hardly knew what she was saying. She wasn't a very passionate little girl as a general thing; but now she was

angry more than grieved, at least she was for a time, and she went about stamping and screaming in a manner that was quite dreadful to behold. She felt that she had been cruelly wronged, and that life wasn't anything at all without the presence of Yellowfoot.

Syl was what they called at the farmhouse, an odd child, and nobody had much opinion of her. She was naughty very often, and did not seem to have much affection for anybody. She wasted all her love on calves, and cats, and dogs, and chickens, and remained in their company the most of the time. But the truth of the matter was, that she was very shy and lonely. Everybody in the house was too busy to pay any attention to her, except to scold her if she were in the way. Her brother Will was too big, and had too great a contempt for girls, to lend her his society; she had no sisters, and there wasn't a child in the neighborhood for her to play with. So, from being much alone, she grew queer and morbid; but she had the warmest, best little heart in the world.

The loss of Yellowfoot grew more and more unendurable as her anger began to cool. Debby had called her to dinner a half hour ago, but she said that she didn't want any dinner, and would not go into the house to eat it; whereupon Debby indulged in some—anything but flattering—remarks concerning her, in her hearing, and Syl sat on the rickety doorsteps, still considering her wrongs.

More than once in her life, when Debby had been unusually cross, and her mother had scolded her, Syl had contemplated running away; and now she was determined to do so. Almost everybody would be kinder to her than they were at home, and she would not stay there any longer. She had two dollars that Uncle Ben gave her on her birthday, up stairs, and ten cents besides, that Will gave her for a piece of old iron which she found. She would go to Deacon Smith's and get Yellowfoot, in the first place, and then she would go to the city and seek her fortune, like a boy that she had been reading about only last night. She thought she should like to wear her Sunday dress, but it would not do for her to put it on, for Debby would be sure to spy her when she went out; there was nothing but what Debby saw; and then she would be sure to meet Will or Sam somewhere on her way, and, if she were to be so fine, they would suspect

something. She tucked her best-white apron into her pocket, however, to put on when she got well out of sight, and made the bent brim of her little sunburnt hat as straight as she could. Then she placed the precious two dollars in her bosom, the ten cents in her pocket, and hurried out of the gate with a rapidly beating heart. She had not made up her mind what she should do when she got to the city, and she had really not decided to go to the city yet. She was only going somewhere, and her mind was full of Yellowfoot.

It was not far to Deacon Smith's house, and as Syl crept softly up the lawn which led to it, she heard a familiar voice making a most desolate sound, and there, shut up in a great coop made of laths, was poor Yellowfoot, with five other companions in misfortune.

"Biddy! biddy! biddy!" said Syl, scarcely above a whisper. But Yellowfoot heard the first call, and flapped her wings eagerly against her prison bars.

Syl cast a furtive glance towards the house, to be sure that no one was looking—though she would have taken her beloved pet from under the deacon's very nose, notwithstanding she was always dreadfully afraid of him, he looked so stern and forbidding—then softly opening the door of the coop, she took the willing hen in her arms, closed it again, and walked away as fast as she could.

"I am not a thief," she said to herself. "I am only taking what is my own."

"Chuck! chuck! chuck!" said Yellowfoot, in her most energetic and delighted tone, which meant, as Syl interpreted it, "That is true."

"Now, Biddy," said Syl, "what shall we do? We haven't any home to go to, because I've run away, and if I go back they won't let me keep you, you know. We've got to find some place where they'll let us live together. I liked puss, and Ponto, and Frisky, but they can do without me, because everybody else likes them too. Will takes care of Frisky, and everybody feeds Ponto; puss catches mice all the time, and steals Debby's cream almost every day, when she doesn't know it! They'll miss me, I know; but I really believe, Biddy, that you like me best. I don't like Debby, and I don't like Will very well, but I do like mother"—at the word mother, Syl couldn't help giving a little sob;—"but she doesn't care anything about me, and says I am bad; and she sold you to Deacon Smith,

when she knew that you were mine, and how much we liked each other."

Yellowfoot hung her head, and looked sad and meditative, but was silent.

"Shall we go to the city? I've got money enough to go in the train."

Yellowfoot didn't seem to approve.

"No," said Syl to herself, this time instead of Biddy. "That wouldn't do. Everybody would laugh to see a little girl in the train, carrying a hen in her arms; if I only had a basket!"

But then, she concluded that it would not be very easy to find an abode for her pet in the city; hens did not reside in the city as a general thing, and concluded to go away into some other town near by, where nobody knew her or her mother, and find some nice people who hadn't any little girl, and wanted one, and who had a nice dooryard full of grasshoppers and dirt to scratch in, for Yellowfoot. But she must hurry, for it was late noon now, and what should she do if she did not find a shelter before dark came on?

She imparted this last plan to Yellowfoot, who said a good deal on the subject, and was evidently highly in favor of this mode of proceeding.

"We can go to Ryefield poorhouse, if we can't find anywhere else to go," said Syl. "That is a place for people who haven't any place to stay, and it isn't bad—at least the one in our town isn't. I've been there, and there are funny people there, and they tell stories, when it's winter, round the fire. I couldn't go there, though, because they know me," spoke Syl, meditatively.

The weather was very warm, and though Biddy was light, Syl didn't find it very pleasant carrying her hugged up in her arms; nor did biddy like it. She protested against it loudly at times, and when Syl got into the village, she succeeded in buying an old basket of a boy with her ten cents. It was a forlorn-looking, battered-up thing, but it was large enough to hold her pet, and there was a cover to it that she could fasten down to keep her in it, so it answered every purpose. Syl thought, at first, that she would take the stage, and go to Ryefield or to Gatesville; then she thought that the stage-driver might know her, and tell her mother where she had gone. So she made up her mind to walk, though the road was through the woods nearly all the way, and she was half afraid. But she trudged on with determined little feet, until it began to grow toward

nightfall, and the little sunshine that struggled through the leaves looked pale and forlorn. The houses on her way grew further and further apart, and she felt as if she were certainly as many as a hundred miles away from home.

"If this is Ryefield," she said, to herself, "I don't think it is a very pretty place, and there don't seem to be any people here who haven't any little girls of their own, and would be likely to want me; but I s'pose I haven't come to Ryefield village, or else I took the wrong way, and am walking to Halifax."

But her strength was beginning to fail; and by the time the cows began to think of going home, and the Ryefield chickens and turkeys were gobbling up the last mouthful of their supper of grasshoppers, she came to the conclusion that she could not go many steps further, and though she assured Yellowfoot that she did not wish herself at home, her voice was somewhat shaky, and Yellowfoot said something that sounded like "I don't believe a word of it!" It was discouraging enough to see such crowds of children about the doors of every cottage and farmhouse that she passed, and everywhere a girl about her size. Syl was sure that there was no chance of her finding a new mother and father here, and made up her mind to go to the poorhouse at once, if the poorhouse were near. If it were not, she didn't know what she should do. Any poor body, who hadn't anywhere else to go, had a right to stay at the poorhouse, she thought; and she didn't like to go and beg a night's lodging at a private house. If there were any people in town who hadn't a little girl, and wanted one, she would like to find them out. Mrs. Small, who lived down at the corner near her mother's house, had lost her own little girl, and wanted one, and she hadn't any doubt but that there were others somewhere, if one only knew where to look for them. Of course she couldn't go to Mrs. Small, because she came to see her mother almost every day, and her mother would find out where she was at once, and take her home again, and give Yellowfoot back to Deacon Smith.

"I'll go in here and ask them if they know of any one who wants a little girl," said she, to herself, stopping before a cheery-looking white farmhouse.

A great tall funny-looking boy opened the door in answer to her timid rap.

Syl blushed and stammered, but made out to give utterance to her questions at last; and Yellowfoot, who was tired of being carried about in a basket, said something, too, in a very energetic tone, whereupon the disagreeable boy began to giggle, as if he were intensely amused at something. Syl drew herself up with an air of great dignity, and without waiting to hear his reply, hurried away as fast as ever she could. There were tears in her eyes, but she wiped them away very quickly, and was determined to be brave, whatever might happen to her. On she went, with her weary lagging little feet, until she came to an old tumble-down looking red farmhouse, that was for all the world just like the poorhouse at home in Greenfield. Syl thought that it must be the Ryefield poorhouse, and whether it was or no, if they would not give her a shelter there for the night, she must sleep out of doors with the owls and bats, for she could not go a single step further.

"Is this the poorhouse?" she asked, of a buxom damsel who appeared in the doorway, before she reached it, staring at her with curious, but not unkindly eyes.

"Lord bless you, no, dear! What made you think so?" said she.

"I don't know," said Syl, who, in her present desperate state of mind, was inclined to be more truthful than polite. "I thought it looked like a poorhouse, 'cos it's such an old poor-looking house. The poorhouse in Greenfield is the poorest house in the place almost, and this is exactly like that."

"You're pretty plain spoken, aint you?" said the girl, laughing. "Have you got any folks at the poorhouse that you're lookin' for?"

"No," said Syl; "but if it was the poorhouse, I was going to ask them to let me stay here all night. I haven't anywhere to go, and I'm so tired." And her lips trembled in spite of herself.

"Gracious goodness!" exclaimed the girl; "aint got anywhere to go? Aint you got no folks?"

"Not about here," said Syl, faintly.

"Like as not you aint had no supper."

Syl shook her head dismally, and a dreadful pang of homesickness came over her as she thought of her mother's cheery kitchen, with the teakettle singing over the red coals, and Debby bustling about to get supper ready. Yellowfoot, too, seemed to be impressed anew with the undesirableness of

her situation, and began to complain lustily. "Just look here, marin," said the girl, seizing Syl by the arm, and dragging her into the presence of a family group, who were just sitting down to the tea-table, with a most embarrassing want of ceremony. "There's the funniest little girl you ever see, a carrying a hen round in a basket, and says she aint got no folks, nor anywhere to stay!"

At any other time Syl's dignity would have received a tremendous shock at this, but now, in her desperate situation, she bore being called "the funniest little girl" very meekly, and eyed the hot cakes on the table, with wistful approval.

"Dear me! I s'pose she's hungry," said the fat kindly-faced woman at the head of the table. "Susy, you take her hat off, and set up a chair for her. What's your name, dear?" addressing Syl.

"Sylvia," said she, feeling uncomfortably conscious of many curious eyes.

"Sylvia what?" pursued her questioner.

"Sylvia Curtis."

"Lor now, I shouldn't wonder if 'twas the Widder Curtis's little gal. I saw her 'tother day, when I went over to Greenfield to see her ma about her wood-lot; and she looked just like this one," said a man in a blue frock, who seemed to be the father of the family.

Syl recognized him at once as the man that Debby laughed at, because he wore such a funny old hat when he came to see her mother. Debby said that Ryefield people weren't much, anyway. That was on a happy day, such a contrast to this one that the memory of it brought a great rush of tears into Syl's eyes; and Yellowfoot, whose basket had been carefully deposited at her mistress's feet, seemed quite overcome, too, and spoke pathetically.

The good people were all sympathy, and Syl was moved to tell them the whole melancholy history of the day, at last, and they all thought that it was too bad that Yellowfoot should have been sold.

"But who would have thought she'd have taken it to heart so?" said the kind woman.

"Father, you must harness right up, and take her home as soon as she eats her supper. Her mother'll be nigh crazy about her, as I should be if 'twas one of my little ones. Don't you fear but she'll buy your biddy back, dear," addressing Syl; "though I can't say that 'twasn't naughty of you to run away so."

Syl was fully conscious of that, and was beginning to think that home would be endurable, even without Yellowfoot.

"Mamma *will* be worried about me," said she, with trembling lips; "only I don't think she cares much about me, anyway."

But mamma *did* care about her. She was indeed well nigh frantic when dark came and Syl was missing; and as time wore on into late evening, the whole household, as well as half the neighbors, were out in search of her. When Syl appeared in the dooryard, about ten o'clock, perched upon the high seat of a farm-wagon, with a strange man beside her, she was greeted with tears of joy. Even Debby, who was promenading the piazza with a lantern, gave her a delighted hug that almost took her breath away.

Syl sobbed in her mother's arms, and had been asked no questions as yet; but Yellowfoot, who had been quietly dozing, suddenly awoke, and breaking loose from her prison-house, hopped out upon the floor, with hoarse exclamations of delight. This explained everything, and her mother said, with her face and voice full of surprise:

"Why, Syl! you loved your biddy more than you did your mother. I never had the least idea how much you thought of her, or I wouldn't have sold her for the world, my dear."

Syl was allowed to keep her pet, and not even Will was allowed to tease her about running away. Deacon Smith was sustained in his loss by the present of a tiny chicken which promised to be just like her in manners and conversational powers, as well as in color and shape. Syl is as great friend as ever with her, but she wouldn't be induced to run away from home again for half a dozen Yellowfeet.

